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And Then They Came For Me ...

The Story of Benjamin Bennoun

Written By Jared Auerbach

My name is Benjamin Bennoun. I am now 83 years old, and although my mind is 100%, my body is beginning to fail me. I have lived a long and fulfilling life. I have worked hard to keep my faith and live up to the expectations I hold for myself and my fellow human beings. Not everyone is perfect, and we can not expect them to be. All we can ask for, in the name of progress, is to learn from our mistakes. We can achieve this by studying history and the lessons it holds for us; good and bad. I now feel it is my duty to pass on my story and the valuable lessons there are to be learned from it. This is my story:

My earliest memories are of playing with the neighborhood children around the well in my backyard, and on the beautiful sea- shore near by my family home. I was born in Jaffa, one of the oldest cities on the Mediterranean Sea, on August 23, 1919. My childhood was pretty standard. The usual horseplay and running around with the kids on my block. Back then, there were no worries in the world for us. Besides an occasional cold shower, or a petty fight with a sibling, the world was our playground and we all lived completely care- free lives. That was before I knew of the cruelty and harsh realities that people were capable of creating.

My ancestors on my father's side lived in Spain until the Inquisition in 1478, at which point they fled to Jerusalem. Although most people fail to recognize it, the Spanish language persisted among these banished Jewish communities in the form of *Ladino*. All of my ancestors spoke *Ladino*. Speaking *Ladino* to someone currently living in Spain would be the equivalent of conversing in Shakespearean era English today in the United States.

My great grandfather Joseph, the first rabbi in Palestine, moved the family to Jaffa. This was the center of the Jewish population in Israel at the time. Joseph fathered several sons in Jaffa, one of which was my grandfather, Chaim. On October 1, 1878, my father, Joshua Bennoun was born in Jaffa.

Educated with a rabbi, my father was extraordinarily intelligent. He was practiced in Arabic, French, Spanish, Hebrew, and Ladino. Always one with an entrepreneurs eye, he eventually managed to establish a currency exchange at the port in Jaffa. His broad range of language skills gave him an advantage in communicating with the foreign customers. The incoming merchants would trade for Turkish currency, and on their way out, they would get English money, or American dollars.

In those years, Palestine was ruled by the Turks, who would remain in control until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after their defeat in WWI.

Miriam Elie, my mother, was born in Bulgaria. With an omnipresent fear of persecution in their homeland, her father decided to move the family to Israel in 1907. Also Sephardic, they too spoke Ladino. After arriving at the port of Jaffa, the first Jewish person my mother laid eyes on was a handsome young man working behind a table at the port, changing currency. The two began talking and it turned out they were a perfect match. It wasn't long until they were married. Soon after that, they had their first child, my oldest brother Joseph Bennoun.

The story of the Elie family's departure from Bulgaria is actually quite noteworthy, in that it shows the deeply seeded anti semitism brewing around the world well before it was actually revealed to the world community. Mr. Elie was a winemaker, and owned a large wine cellar on a hill. One day, when he went to drink with a few friends, he opened the door to the cellar and found a small Christian child sitting inside. Being very confused, he asked the child what he was doing there. "You put me here," replied the little boy. Completely baffled, Mr. Elie sent the boy on his way and proceeded to go about his business. The next day, a makeshift group of vigilantes from town confronted my grandfather and accused him



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of using the little boys blood to make matzoh for Passover. This was a common myth made up to dehumanize Jews. Although my grandfather denied the accusations, the accusers were confident they could find proof. This clearly being a set up, he gave the mob permission to search his wine cellar. After seeing for themselves the boy was not there, they dropped the issue.

Though this incident was escaped without harm, it was the straw that broke the camel's back, and my grandfather vowed to get his family out of Bulgaria as soon as possible. This led to their arrival at the port in Jaffa, where they ran into Joshua Bennoun, sitting behind a money changing table at the port.

In 1914, things drastically changed for my family, who were really just getting their feet on the ground in Jaffa. When archbishop Frans Ferdinand was assassinated by a young Serbian man, the community of the world was thrown into the first of two tragic 20th century world wars. Because my family had French nationality, and the war pitted the French against the Turkish, the family immediately became enemies of the state. The family was swiftly evacuated by boat, and for the remainder of the war

would reside in Cairo, Egypt. This was possible because Britain had control of Egypt at the time, and they were allied to the French.

By this time, there were five children and my parents. In Cairo, they were confined to large hangars with other refugees from the war. These awful living conditions would not suffice for my mother and she promptly found a place for them to live in the city. Opening a small milinery shop, where they sold thread, cloth, wool, and those types of things, my parents were able to make enough money to support the five children and at least survive the duration of the war. Eventually the Allied powers win the war and the Turkish were expelled from Israel. At this point, despite the relative success of his shop, my father decided to move our family back to Israel. It was on the trip back to Jaffa, when my father found the career that he would maintain for the rest of his life, and which would eventually give me the opportunities that subsequently changed my life.

Because of the shop my family maintained in Egypt, they had excess wares to bring back to Jaffa. There were tarrifs to bring goods into the country. It was when my father was paying taxes on the merchandise he was returning with, that he realized there were no Jews working customs at the port; it was all arabs. My father saw the lucrative possibilities in the situation and eventually became customs commisioner for the port of Jaffa.

I was born in 1919, and after a few rough years struggling to get by we were able to finally buy a house. I was eventually blessed with two more brothers, and our family grew that way.

My mother was always a very hard worker, and that really sticks out in my memory of my early years. Because for a long time we had very little money, she would find old clothes and repair them for the kids. It wasn't a rare occasion for her to be up well past midnight doing work around the house or making clothes for the family. She wanted nothing but the best for us and would not settle for anything less. I think it is because of her that I became such a perfectionist. She taught me the value of hard work and dedication to people we love.

Every Friday night when I was growing up, we would begin to celebrate the Sabbath. My mother and sisters would begin preparing the Friday night dinner the day before, because the oven could not be used during the Sabbath. Friday night, after we all went to synagogue, we would walk home and have a big family dinner. After getting home from services, my father would say the kiddush, which is the blessing over the wine, and then we would eat. After dinner we would all fight over who was on dishes

that week, and then the young ones would go off and play while the more mature ones of us would sit around the dinner table talking for the rest of the night.

Some of my best memories are of the Jewish holidays. This was very important to my family and I because it brought us together and recognized our history and traditions as Jews. We would get presents on Rosh Hashannah, which was a favorite for the kids, but what I really remember was Passover. We had special Passover dishes, and it was always a great occasion to bring them out. The time spent with my family was really great. This was a time to honor our past and the all the challenges and triumphs of our people throughout history. The special dishes served as a sign of the importance of this holiday and had a profound impact.

Saturdays were spent studying the torah and the Jewish religion. This was very important to me. Partly because I was the only one of my siblings to do this, and partly because I feel there has always been something inside of me linking my soul to the Jewish nation. These long Saturday afternoons made me feel close to my father and gave me a better connection to my religion, which is really all about being connected with the past. The tradition and the life lessons learned by studying the torah and the talmud

were very important to me and really helped mold me into the man I was soon to become.

I was always working odd jobs as a child to try and make a little money to help out the family. It was no mystery, even for a young boy that my parents worked exhaustingly hard to give the children the best life possible. This work ethic and responsibility definitely rubbed off on me. I had countless jobs growing up. Whether it was breaking rocks, helping the school nurse, chiseling walls for electrical wires, or even working in a bank, I was always doing something to make a little money and keep myself busy.

I also used to work for my father a lot down at the port. He had been showing me the ways of the port system since I was seven years old and it was not long until I became pretty proficient in the customs process. There were all sorts of jobs they would have me do around the port as a youngster.

One time when I had the day off of school, I went to the port with my father in the morning to help out running errands for him and his staff. That day, a large shipment of cement had arrived in barrels from somewhere in Europe. The ship that brought them could only get about a mile from shore, so from there, smaller boats would help take the barrels to the trucks waiting on shore.

While one of the smaller boats was transferring the barrels to the trucks, they accidentally dropped one. When it fell, it broke open and a steel box fell out. It turned out this steel box was filled with weapons. The British police were quickly on the scene and would not let anyone, including myself, in or out of the port area. The destination of the weapons was subsequently surrounded by soldiers, but further information was not available. I found out later that the arms were intended for the underground military organization of the yishuv, called *The Haganah*. Although it was never really clear who was responsible, and man I knew named Mr. Katan was expelled from the country. This incident impacted me greatly because besides a few incidents, as a child I was not subjected to the fierce hatred and cruelty in the world. I did not know why anyone would need guns to protect themselves.

The way I see it, the British pit the arabs against the Jews in order to make securing order in their mandate easier. As the colonial system around the world began to deteriorate, the British felt insecure in their holdings, so the natural and easy solution was to let the two sides who wanted the land fight it out while they served as the referee. So that is what they did, they pushed the arabs to fight the Jews. The Haganah was the underground Jewish military.

The same thing has happened in India, where the British have set up a system of control through the violence between the Muslims and Hindus. If there is internal unrest among the population, then the British have legitimate business controlling the area. We can also see this system in Cyprus, where the British had the Turkish and the Greeks fighting each other and maintaining empathy for Britain to control the area. If nothing was going wrong, there would be no need for the British to be there.

Though our neighborhood was comprised mostly of arabs, I do not recall ever having any problems with any of them over racial issues. Remember that as a child, one doesn't hate others. Hatred takes time to build up like a snowball rolling down a hill. Someone has to push the snowball to get the initial roll, and it is after the initial push that it gains speed and stature.

Another important part of my maturing years was my involvement in Hashomer Hazair. This was a socialist boyscout organization. In this organization, children got an education in the ways of Marxist thought. Beyond learning socialist ideology, they got a scout's education. It was just like the modern day boy scouts in the United States. This organization started you young in the hopes that you would eventually build and live on a Kibbutz.

At first my father was very against this. He was obviously a capitalist, as he was taking care of his family by working as a customs commissioner. Although he was completely apposed to me having anything to do with this socialist group at first, he got over it. His initial weariness actually wore off because one of his superiors backed it up. One day he was at work complaining about my involvement, but it turned out his boss had three sons, all of whom were members of Hashomer Hazair. This was a relief because I was always trying to make my father proud and because my involvement in Hashomer Hazair meant a lot to me.

Hashomer Hazair was very important to me in those years, and would prove to be a valuable connection in the journey that awaited my later years. I also liked it because excelled as a scout. At the age of 16, I was already given an authoritative role, as I was put in charge of 80 boys and girls. It was in Hashomer Hazair that I gained proficiency in map reading, forestry, mountain survival, and other skills that would actually save my life in my later years.

One weekend my group and I were on a camping trip in the forest. In the middle of the night, someone smelt smoke so we all rushed over to where the smell was coming from in order to help. It turned out the fire was in a nearby kibbutz, but they had very little water. The fire was raging in

one of their barns, which was full of hay. Because of the lack of water, we decided our best option was to use milk to try and subdue the flames while we got the hay out of the barns. As I began to put our plan into action, I realized the hay was there to cover up their supply of weapons. Weapons had been stockpiled under the hay in this barn. Luckily, we eventually put the fire out and nobody was too badly hurt. What stands out is not the fact that a barn was burnt, it was that a kibbutz in the middle of the woods had to have a stash of weapons. I guess that speaks to the danger of conflicts with the Arabs, even back then, and to the fact that however things look on the surface, there is always some hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism in the air. It was scary to think that people living in a Kibbutz out in the forest did not even feel safe.

Although I was only seven years old at the time, I still remember the pogrom of 1926. I was too young to understand the significance, but the images of hatred are still with me to this day. This incident was extra shocking to me because I grew up with a good friend who was an Arab. He owned a camel and we used to ride it from his house down to the beach to play. As I said, I was very young at the time, but I do remember seeing Jews fighting off their aggressors with hoes that had nails driven through the tops. They were barely credible as weapons, but it was all they had. Many people

died in the violence. At such a young and naïve age, I had no idea why everyone decided to hate each other that day.

While some people are born with a mind for math or science or writing, I have always been the creative type and have always been very dexterous. When I was a little boy, there was always construction going on in town. The construction companies would use bags of cement to build. These bags of cement would be tied at the top with string, and after the cement was used, the bags and the string would be discarded. I used to ride my bike to an area in the woods about four miles from my house, where skinny bamboo sticks, about an inch in diameter grew. After collecting bamboo and the dumped string from the construction sites, I was able to make myself a kite by gluing paper to the frame made from the bamboo and the string. One time my kindergarten teacher saw me flying my kite and actually offered to buy one for me. This was just something I did for fun, but I ended up making a little money out of it, which was great considering the size of my family.

A few years later, something similar happened. I found an old baby carriage, and made myself a little cart using the wheels from the carriage and

an old orange crate I found at the port. I even made a steering wheel. When my neighbor Mr. Dobrovsky saw me riding this little go cart down the hill in front of our house, he offered to buy one from me. I was the proudest kid in the world to actually impress a grownup that much. I really wasn't interested in making money or getting noticed, these things were for myself, but these instances of unwanted merit really boosted my confidence and gave me the courage to trust my instincts and gave me a self confidence that would perpetuate into my later years.

I was really just into my own things at that point. Whatever the crowd was doing had no impact on me. A perfect example was one time when my uncle came to visit from Egypt. He would always bring presents when he came and this time it was a soccer ball. I brought it to school with me the next day and my classmates were ecstatic. I was pleased to make them so happy, but at recess I passed up the soccer game because I wanted to finish reading something. This was just who I was. From the beginning, I always followed my heart and did whatever I felt was the right thing to do at the time. This is the true way to happiness as far as I am concerned and has been the way I lived my life.

It was my love for fixing things and doing odd jobs that led me to obtain a job in a local machine shop when I turned 14. Again, anything I

could do to help my family's financial situation made me feel good, so this was the perfect opportunity to pull in some extra money and do something I loved at the same time.

After finishing my studies at a private school in Jaffa, I began to work full time at the machine shop. That was also when I began to train at a polytechnical school a couple miles from my house. At that point, I would put in a full day at the shop, and then go to the polytechnical school at night. The polytechnical school went from 6:00 pm until 10:30 pm every night, so as soon as I was done with work I would ride my bike home, grab a quick bite to eat, and then it was off to class.

It was in 1938, that my mother suggested I go to Paris to finish my studies. Part of her motivation was that she had no interest in having a socialist son living in a Kibbutz. When it came to this, my French citizenship, and the fact that I already had a brother and a sister with established lives in Paris was enough for my mother to decide that I would finish my polytechnical studies in Paris.

The Versaille Treaty, which followed WWI, had an enormous influence on the rest of the 20th century. In terms of the document's

influence on the Second World War, there are many connections that could be made. It could be argued that many of the faults in the Versaille treaty came about because the defeat of Germany came a year earlier than expected. Instead of an Allied invasion of Germany herself, which would have forced an unconditional surrender, the suddennes of the German defeat led to limitations on the demands of the victors and no clear recognition of military defeat on the side of a lot of Germans. Although there were military, territorial, and monetary terms for the Treaty, arguably one of the most serious ways the treaty impacted the next 25 years in Europe was in the way it divided up the conquered territory. (weinberg 7)

There was widespread, and justified concern by the victors of future German military might. This was completely justifiable, considering the awful fighting seen on the front lines of the First World War. The worlkd could not let something like this ever happen again. While it was understood that the German state would remain, there had to be limitations (weinberg 9) in order to censor military buildup. The Belligerents of the First World War had to have their land divided in a manner so that the world would save itself from another disaster similar to what it was trying to crawl out of. This was not an easy task.

One major significance of the newly drawn Europe was the creation of a new State, Czechoslovakia, out of portions of Austria-Hungary. This became a contentious issue because of the large German minority in the Sudetenland, which was part of the land acquired by this new state.

Another important feature of the new Europe, which directly affected the Germans was the demilitarization of the Rhineland. This was complemented with a temporary military occupation of this area (everything West of the Rhine river plus a strip East of it) to ensure adherence to the terms of the treaty.

The handcuffs placed on Germany from the Versailles Treaty, along with the stab-in-the-back legend from the homefront in WWI, had a large role in the years preceeding WWII.

With the concessions mentioned, it is no wonder that when Hitler began his rise to power one of his main goals was stirring up discontent in the German minorities of other countries.

It was as soon as 1921 that the disgruntled WWI veteran, Adolph Hitler became the leader of the National Socialist Party (Nazi). At this time, the German economy was in bad shape. The post-war years marked an economic crisis in Germany, which led to mass

unemployment and extreme currency inflation. These elements helped strengthen extremist parties and wiped out a large portion of the middle class. In the years to come, many extreme nationalists would find refuge in the rising Nazi party.

One of the first signs of the future order in Germany came on November 8th, 1923, when the Bavarian Government held a meeting of about 3,000 officials in Munich. While Gustav von Kahr, the Prime Minister of Bavaria was making a speech, Hitler and his armed storm troopers (also known as SA or brownshirts, they were Hitler's own private army) entered the building. Hitler jumped on a table, fired two shots in the air, and told the audience that the National Revolution had begun. The plan was now to march on Berlin in order to remove the national government. This incident would historically be referred to as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch.

Because of reasons not worth getting into, the Putsch was eventually put down by the Munich police, and because of Nazi sympathizers in the Bavarian government, Hitler received a sentence of only five years in jail. This sentence was surprisingly modest, as he could have easily been found guilty of high treason. This served to briefly weaken the leadership of the Nazi Party, however, it also

conversely acted as wind on the Nazi Parties coals. Hitler wrote his famous *Mein Kampf* in prison, which was published in July 1925.

Through an easing of reparation payments and other measures Germany was able to recover economically and politically from her postwar problems. This would all come to an end however, when the Wall Street Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929, leading to a worldwide economic depression. This caused mass unemployment and business failure in Germany, and added to the mounting social and political tensions from the previous decade. Now the Nazi and Communist parties were gaining power in the Reichstag (the seat of the German parliamentary government) the other coalitions were beginning to have a hard time getting anything accomplished without Hitler's support.

Thinking that Hitler could be constrained, President Paul von Hindenburg made him chancellor in March of 1933. This was a fateful move in the history of Germany, but it tells us a lot about the elements contributing to Hitler's rise in power. This sort of appeasement with hopes of putting off problems would become a reoccurring theme in the terrible reign of the Nazis in Germany and later in most of Europe. Because people were still suffering from the horrors of the First World

War, which left the continent crippled, they continually made concessions to a mad man in an attempt to avoid conflict.

Less than a month after Hitler was made chancellor there was a disaster that would prove to act as a spring-board in his rise to power. On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag was set on fire. The entire building was gutted from the flames. This is rather interesting, considering the new elections were scheduled for March 5th, just 7 days later. Either way, the building was destroyed. It wasn't long before Chancellor Hitler and Prussian Minister Goring arrived on the scene. They immediately blamed the disaster on the Communists. This was exactly what they needed to boost their support and a perfect excuse to censor political opponents.

Hitler quickly induced Hindenburg, who was 86 years old and feared a communist revolution, to sign an emergency decree suspending the basic rights of citizens until the end of the emergency. Thousands of communists, as well as intellectuals and professional men were immediately arrested. The decree was also used by the Nazi party to boost their chances in the upcoming election. The Marxist press was silenced, and other competing parties had their meetings broken up by SA thugs.

Although the Nazis failed to win the two thirds majority they would need to change the constitution in the proceeding election, the panic and outrage caused by the burning of the Reichstag building and the subsequent emergency decree still left Hitler with the power he sought after (the Nazi party came away with 44% of the votes).

Later that month, the Nazis made their boldest move yet when they attempted to get the Enabling Act passed by the Reichstag. This act, formally called the, “Law for Removing the Distress of the People and the Reich”, would establish the legal dictatorship of Adolf Hitler.

The Nazis took many steps to convince people this was a good idea, and again, people bought it. Just before the vote, Hitler made a speech to the Reichstag, in which he vowed to use restraint. He depicted himself as a conservative national leader and promised an end to unemployment as well as the promotion of peace with France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. His persuasive speeches, along with brownshirt intimidation measures on the day of the vote led to an overwhelming vote to pass the act. This event marked the beginning of the end for the German Democratic Republic. There would be no more democracy—Adolph Hitler was the new, legally appointed, dictator of Germany.

Hitler then promised the creation of the Third Reich. This was supposed to be the successor of the Holy Roman and Hohenzollern empires, and would last a thousand years. Now that he was chancellor, he began the *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of every aspect of German life. This involved organizing young people into *Hitlerjugend* (semimilitary groups) and indoctrinating them with the Nazi creed. This was followed by eliminating political opponents and making the Nazi party the sole legal party.

The month of April would show exactly the type of conservatism Hitler was ready to observe. The Nazis tried to get Germans to boycott Jewish businesses in a response to the “atrocious propaganda being spread abroad by international Jewry.” There were also laws introduced making ‘aryanism’ a necessary requirement in order to hold any civil service position. This was followed by the prohibition of Jews from serving as patent lawyers or as doctors in state-run insurance institutions. By October, Jewish admittance into public schools was limited, Jews were no longer allowed to participate in any cultural and entertainment activities including literature, art, film, theatre, journalism, and were banned from serving in any government position (source 7).

This also corresponded with the opening of the first concentration camps to hold political prisoners and all known non-Nazis. The camps were opened because of overcrowding of conventional prisons. While the first camps were hastily thrown together, it wasn't long before Himmler constructed a new SS run concentration camp. This was Dachau, which would become the prototype for future, larger camps.

Strict order was demanded by the SS guards in these camps, and there were severe punishments for anyone who did not comply with their regulations. Penalties for misbehavior included beatings, solitary confinement, and being forced to stand completely still for hours. The existence of these early camps and rumors of the brutality that went on inside was an effective measure in suppressing any political opposition to Hitler's regime (21, 17).

In May of 1933, students from Universities in Berlin and other cities gathered to burn books with "unGerman" ideas. Books by Freud, Einstein, Thomas Mann, Jack London, H.G. Wells, and many other went up in flames on this terrible day in history. Over one hundred years earlier, a German-Jewish poet named Heinrich Heine had said, "Those who burn books will one day burn human beings". This atrocity marks a devastating day in the history of humanity (8).

The year of 1934 was no better for the Civil rights of non- Aryan Germans. All opponents to the Nazi party had been eliminated, and when Reich President Hindenburg died, Reich Chancellor Hitler named himself fuhrer. He did this by passing the following law, just hours after the President's death:

Section 1. The office of Reich President will be combined with that of Reich Chancellor. The existing authority of the Reich President will consequently be transferred to the Fuhrer and Reich Chancellor, Adolph Hitler. He will select his deputy.

Section 2. This law is effective as of the time of the death of Reich President von Hindenburg.

By becoming Fuhrer, Hitler had accomplished everything possible, and he was the state. He controlled every aspect of German life now. The final step to this rise in power came when the German Officers' Corps and every person in the German Army swore a personal oath of allegiance to the Adolf Hitler (source 3 & 9).

The years following Hitler becoming fuhrer clearly show what his political and military ambitions were from the beginning. This is when Hitler began to pursue his goal of cleansing the German population. This can be seen in the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935. These laws made Jews 'subjects' in the Third Reich. They also made it illegal for Jews to marry or have sexual relations with Aryans. These

laws were followed by requirements to get certificates verifying sufficient health to get a marriage license (in order to “protect the genetic health of the German people”). With the Nuremberg Laws and many supplemental Nazi decrees that followed, Jews were eventually deprived of all rights as human beings and were eventually outlawed completely (source 10).

In order to accomplish all this Hitler put the radio, press, cinema, and theatre under the control of propaganda minister Goebbels. Goebbels would proceed to promote hatred of Jews and the emulation of Hitler himself (source 3 & 11).

In 1936, the German army occupied the Rhineland. This was a direct violation of the Versailles Treaty, but again, Hitler was appeased for fear of repeating the bloody stalemate of WWI.

Also in 1936, civil war broke out in Spain between the Fascists, led by General Francisco Franco, and the loyalist. Despite the signing of a non intervention pact by 27 nations, both sides relied heavily on outside support. The major players were Germany and Italy on the side of the Fascists and the USSR on the side of the loyalists. In yet another example of appeasement for fear of another European conflict, Great Britain and France stayed out of this conflict. This served as a perfect

testing ground for German Blitzkrieg techniques which would be very significant in the future (source 14).

The next important event in the history of this terrible decade was the famous Hossbach conference. This was the turning point to an expansionist empire. Hitler held a secret meeting in the Reich Chancellery where he revealed his plans for the acquisition of *lebensraum* (living space) for the German people. Because he was out to secure, preserve, and enlarge his racial community, he would need space. It was at this secret meeting, that he outlined his plans for acquiring this living space he deemed essential for Germany. After swearing everyone present to secrecy, Hitler told them that in the event of his death, the following was to be regarded as his last will and testament:

Military action was to be taken by 1943-1945 at the latest in order to prevent military obsolescence and the aging of the Nazi movement. The first goal was to seize Czechoslovakia and Austria to protect Germany's eastern and southern flanks. Hitler followed by outlining three different strategies designed to defeat Britain and France depending on the circumstances. Conscription had been in place since 1935. The meeting was attended by: the German War Minister; the

Commander in Chief of the Army; the Commander in Chief of the Navy; the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe; the Foreign Minister; and Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, who took the minutes of the conference (source 12 & 13, 20).

It has already been mentioned that Hitler had his eyes on the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. There were as many as 3 million Germans living there, and they were already fighting for improved status. In September 1938, Hitler demanded self-determination for the Sudetenland. Things got so bad in Czechoslovakia after these demands that martial law was proclaimed.

The crisis in Czechoslovakia, along with the mobilization of the German military and the announcement of a German *Anschluss* (union) with Austria prodded Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain to attempt to negotiate with Hitler. Nothing could be accomplished between the two at this point and war seemed inevitable, but because of appeals by Mussolini and Roosevelt a conference was scheduled in Munich for the end of the month. Present at the conference were representatives from Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany. Here we find yet another situation where Hitler was appeased. Of course hind- sight is always twenty-twenty, but France

and England seem to have surrendered quite easily to all of Hitler's demands. Germany was permitted to immediately occupy the Sudetenland. Although they were supposed to provide plebiscites, this obviously never took place. Chamberlain arrived back to London assuring his people that he had "secured peace in our time".

Soon after the appeasement at the Munich Conference, the German army occupied Sudetenland and the Czech government subsequently resigned. Less than a year later the Nazis would take the rest of Czechoslovakia.

It was soon after the Munich conference that my plans to go study in Paris finally unfolded. On October 20, 1938, I boarded the French ship *Patria*, leaving my family and friends behind, to go finish my degree as a mechanical engineer in Paris. It took seven long days of travelling to finally reach this epic city, but when I finally made it I was pleasantly surprised. It was magnificent. Every rumor of this fabulous city seemed to be true. From the coffee shops lining every sidewalk to the awe-inspiring Eiffel tower looming overhead, everything was perfect.

I really did not fear a war back then. My family and I were convinced, as was the rest of the world, that Hitler had been given what he wanted in Munch and was through. Everyone thought the Nazis would be satisfied with what they got. Little did we know they had much more ambitious goals, and that they had more on there mind then simply occupying some land.

Although my mother had taught French back in Israel, I always refrained from learning it. This was partly due to the natural rebellion of youngsters and partly because I always wanted to stay in Israel with Hashomer Hazair. But now that I was there, I had to learn the language and get accustomed to the city. I had always been good with languages, so that wasn't too difficult to do, especially with the help of the family I had living there.

My sister Judith, and her husband, lived a few Metro stops from the station I arrived at, and they were there to pick me up when my train got in. Judith had married a french man named George ----- . George was a -----, and Judith was a nurse. They took care of me while I was getting my feet on the ground, getting started with school, and learning the language.

My oldest brother, Joseph, also lived in the Paris area, except way further out of town. After working different places as a doctor in the city, a job opening came up out in the country and he jumped at the opportunity. With the intentions of raising a family, this was a perfect opportunity to settle down and establish himself in an area suitable to have children and run a successful practice. I used to take trips to visit them on the weekends. They would give me a little money here and there in exchange for fixing things, building furniture, and doing other housework to help out. It was not much money, but it helped pay for my Metro fares and I enjoyed spending time with them.

For the most part, things in Paris went smoothly. You could definitely feel the threat of war a little, but that was nothing completely unusual and I really tried not to let it effect me. I enrolled in school to finish my education as a manual engineer, and found an apartment. I really lived a relatively normal life: going to the countryside to visit family on the weekends and taking my classes during the week.

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY GILBERTE

BENNOUN

July, 1982

Benjamin, a handsome boy of eighteen came from Tel-Aviv. He was always smiling and was very handy. He was always ready to help with whatever had to be done and I liked him very much.

Upon his arrival he spoke very little French, but it wasn't long before he was speaking fluently. He was constantly entertaining the children and making them laugh.

One day we went to a little meadow which George owned to pick cherries. I can see us just as if it were yesterday, on a beautiful summer day, sitting on the grass beneath trees blanketed with fruit. We were happy and carefree, completely forgetting the lurking war.

Things only got worse from there.

The menace of war hung heavily over Europe. On the radio, one began to hear the guttural voice of Hitler exulting his people and instilling terror in the hearts of those who apposed him.

The French, too confident, believed they were sheltered beyond their ridiculous Maginot Line and their armaments, which they regarded as powerful. Our heads were crammed with lies.

The night of November 9, 1938 marks another horrifying event in the history of humanity. This was when the horrors against the Jewish race really came to the public stage. Using the assassination in Paris of a German diplomat named Ernst von Rath as a scapegoat, the Nazi party unleashed unprecedented violence against Jews in Germany.

Culminating years of anti-semitism, hatred and violence, this night would be known throughout history as the Kristallnacht, or the night of broken glass. Hitler and Goebbels used the shooting as an opportunity to incite Germans to “rise in bloody vengeance against the Jews”. While police stood aside as spectators, Jews were beaten and murdered, their homes and businesses were destroyed, and many women and children were brutalized (23, 24).

Von Rath was murdered by a 17 year old Jew living in Paris named Herschel Grynszpan. The act was in retaliation for the expulsion of 15,000 Polish Jews from Germany thirteen days earlier without warning. The expelled group included Grynszpan’s family, who were forcibly transported in boxcars and then simply dumped at the border of Poland. By the Afternoon of November 10, 91 Jews were dead, 170 synagogues were burned to the ground, and more than 7,000 businesses were destroyed. Although many Jews at the time believed the violence following Hitler’s seizure of power would be a unique, this event proved otherwise, and as a result, thousands began to flee Germany in the days following this terrible pogrom (23, 24). This horrible day is called the night of broken glass because of the mess that was left after the destruction.

Shortly after this open act of anti semitic aggression, the “Pact of Steel” was signed, formally bridging the National Socialist party in Germany with Mussolini’s Fascist party in Italy. Mussolini had already taken Albania and Ethiopia. This pact, made by two States with similar ideologies and similar aspirations, assured their solidarity (25).

At this point, France and Poland were obviously threatened by the rising power of the belligerent governments in the area. Hitler was clearly thinking expansion, and they were obvious focal points for the accumulation of new land. France had the Maginot Line, which was a fortified line of defense set up facing the East to assure security in the event of a German invasion. This was the result of the inability to erect a large standing army and because of the belief coming from the First World War that *defense* was the key. This would soon prove to be a futile grasp at security. Poland had even less of a chance should they be attacked. Unprotected, with a small army, they were almost completely at the mercy of the any army in the area who decided to become belligerent. (25, wein,26).

Insert a paragraph about the pacts between the allies before any invasion took place, during the appeasement years. Talk about significance.

By this time, in the USSR, it could be argued that Joseph Stalin was almost keeping up with Hitler in terms of atrocities committed against civilians in their respective countries. Whether you're looking at either of his five year plans or the purging of his government, or the massacre in Georgia, it is not hard to find instances in which this man crossed the lines of humanity which Hitler was readily and rapidly crossing.

This is where the history of the 20th century came to the point of no return. In late August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a secret non-aggression treaty. Openly, they declared non aggression towards each other. Behind closed doors, the two nations effectively split up Eastern Europe into zones of influence. This was the spring board Hitler had been looking for because only a fool would attempt to fight a war on two fronts. That would be essentially cutting your army in half. Now the German army had secured (at least temporarily) its Eastern flank and could begin accumulating Hitler's *lebenstraun* (living space) (27, 28, wein.).

It is odd that we find so many instances of Hitler relating Bolshevism/ Communism to international Jewry, and then we see him sign this pact. There seems to be no chance that this agreement would

last, but that is just another case of hindsight being twenty-twenty.

Appearing before the Nazi Reichstag on the sixth anniversary of his coming to power, Hitler shows exactly why one could argue he never planned to hold to his agreement. He proclaimed,

“Today I will once more become a prophet: if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!”

Stalin’s hands were tied here however. The Japanese Empire threatened him on the East, and he was quickly watching all potential allies team up against him (18,19,30,31).

A week after the pact was signed, the German army invaded Poland using their unprecedented strategy known as Blitzkrieg (lightning strike). It took them 17 days to take most of Poland and the Second World War was underway.

On September 3, 1939 -two days after the invasion of Poland- Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany. No matter who you were, or where you were living, your life would never be the same.

When France declared war on Germany, being Jewish and thinking of myself as a citizen of France, I wrote a letter to the minister of the Air Force requesting admittance into their school for airplane mechanics. In France, there was mandatory army service, but I remember the corruption involved in the position one would assume. The French were traditionally aristocratic, even when it came to military service. The French army wasn't like the US. You needed to have a special family to have a good position. Being part of The Air Force was considered one of these good positions. With the help of a letter from my brother, I was able to be accepted to the Air Force and went off to school as an airplane mechanic. I was a volunteer, because military service was only mandatory after your 21st birthday.

When I was in the army, they used to use ink pens, and in the classrooms we would share the ink ----- . One time, there were 6 or 7 people in line to get more ink. As one of my classmates was walking by, he spilt some ink on my notebook. I told him he was a fool, and he lashed back, "shut up you dirty jew". I was not the type to put up with a comment like that, so without hesitation I punched the guy in the face, giving him a black eye. Although we eventually became good friends, it was surely a

sign of the lingering antisemitism in the air before the Vichy government was even mentioned.

Joseph was already serving in the army as a doctor and George had joined as a soldier. We had very little information about where they were or what they were doing at this time.

After a few months at the airplane mechanics school, they began to catch on to the fact that although I had the papers for my French citizenship, I didn't speak the language perfectly and was not a native. I think it had a lot to do with the anti-Semitism of those years. Although I was ecstatic to be helping with the fight and to have such an important position, it could not last. Eventually, they informed me I was merely a "subject" of France and not a citizen. For this reason I was obliged to leave the army.

After being released from the Air Force I returned to Paris to try and find my brothers and sisters and hopefully find a job. I initially went to live with Joseph, who was released temporarily from the army because of the birth of his first child. I stayed with Joseph, Gilberte and their child until Joseph was able to find me a job at a factory in the city owned by one of his patients. I moved back to Paris, and lived there with Gilberte's mother, Madame Lyon. Madame Lyon was a very warm and took care of me during these horrible times. She was a teacher in a music school and did not have a

mean bone in her body. So she let me stay at her place where some of her students were residing as well while I worked for the man Joseph had set me up with.

My new job was to make screws for airplanes. It was not the most exciting job in the world, but it supplied some much needed money, kept me busy, and made me feel like I was at least contributing to the war effort even if the army did not want my help. Work at the factory became mandatory as the war progressed because our job was deemed vital to the war effort. This is common when countries are at war. You can not have steel workers go on strike if you need to make tanks to save your country.

By this point, Judith and her daughter had already gone to St. George d' Auroc, where she planned to hide with a friend of our family, Sister Marie-Clarie. There was a monestary there, and we had all become friends with the sister when she was living in Paris. We knew we could count on her, and the fact that this was a little town in the mountains made it seem like a perfect place for the women to seek shelter while the men were off serving in the military. When Joseph was reassigned, Gilberte and their two children followed suit.

After they left I was on my own. I continued to work in the airplane factory and waited for whatever fate would have in store for me.

The Germans took Poland with little hinderance. The Poles had their hands tied. If they had mobilized their forces, they would not only hurt their economy due to lack of a labor force, but also ran the risk of looking like the aggressors. This, along with the fact that their weapons were far inferior, the Poles did not stand a chance. The Germans unleashed their Blitzkrieg and caught the Poles before they knew what hit them. The idea that Britain and France would protect he Poles quickly slipped away as the rest of the world watched Poland disappear off the map.

Before completely collapsing, however, the Poles did a few very important things which would prove vital to the outcome of the war. First of all, they at least made an attempt to hold off the attack. Second, they made sure not to give any excuse to the Germans that they provoked an attack. Finally, their code breaking experts were able to turn over, to Britain and France, their reproductions of the German enigma machine. This machine was used for decoding radio messages and would prove vital in many aspects of the coming war.

Although the French had promised to attack from the West in the event of a German attack, this never happened. The Poles were also counting on a non aggression pact with the Soviet Union, which as we will see, was far from reliable. Two weeks after the Germans took their allotted zone of Poland, the Russians came through to take their piece of the pie. Luckily, a lot of Poles escaped their fate by escaping over the Hungarian or Romanian border and lived to fight another day with another army helping the Allied powers. But Poland ceased to exist.

It did not take long for the Germans to begin instituting their racial policies in Poland, which had a Jewish population of 3.35 million. After the partition with the Soviets, over two million Jews were left in the Nazi controlled area.

“The Jewish people ought to be exterminated root and branch.

Then the plague of pests would have disappeared in Poland at one stroke.”

– Der Sturmer (Nazi Newspaper published by Julius Streicher, September 1939)

Soon after the completed invasion of Poland, Hitler ordered the beginning of the Nazi Euthanasia program to eliminate “life unworthy of life”. This was the beginning of Nazi exterminations. The euthanasia killing centers became the training centers for the SS as well as where

the technical aspects of mass murder, such as gas chambers and crematoriums, were perfected. Within two months of the invasion, Hitler had ordered forced labor for all Jews aged 14 to 60, the internment in Ghettos for the rest, and the mandatory wearing of Yellow Stars of David by all Polish Jews over age 10.

“The time is near when a machine will go into motion which is going to prepare a grave for the world’s criminal - Judah – from which there will be no resurrection.” – Der Sturmer (Nazi newspaper published by Julius Streicher, January 1940)

Within less than a year, the Jews from Germany began being deported to the killing centers established in Poland. These included Auschwitz, Treblinka and others.

On April 9, 1940, the German army invaded Denmark. Then on the night of May 9, 1940, German troops infiltrated Luxemburg. This set the stage for the invasion of Holland and Belgium the next day. These neutral countries were the perfect avenue for the German’s planned defeat of the French, which would set up a perfect coastal base for the destruction of England. Once the Germans had defeated the French and British in the West, they would have secured the quiet they

needed to go ahead with their plans to acquire *lebanstraum* for their people in the East.

The Maginot line was a system of fortifications spanning the Eastern frontier of France. It was supposed to run from the Swiss border in the South to the Belgian border in the North, although was not fully complete at the outbreak of war. This was France's solution to their problems from WWI. Thinking the next war would be similar to the last, they figured the Maginot line would be sufficient to halt the advancement of an attacking German infantry. With the Ardennes Forest covering the border of Belgium, they thought they were safe.

The reliance by the French on the supposedly unpassable Ardennes Forest proved futile in the coming weeks. The modern war equipment of the Nazis rolled through the forest with little hindrance. The Maginot line, which was built facing the East now proved futile, with the Germans advancing on France from the North and the high powered guns facing away from the action.

The Germans were making their move on through France now with little in their way. It seemed inevitable that before long, they would control all of western Europe.

Things were not good in Paris those days. As valiantly as the people of the Netherlands and Belgium fought, they were no match for the powerful war machine of the Nazis. Eventually the Germans began bombing Paris, which was particularly frightening. The French Air Force was powerless and there was nothing we could do except *try* to keep life as normal as possible. One day I saw a bomb hit a house and tear it in half. The remaining half of the house was still intact and I could see the kitchen and a bed. It was an awful thing to see. I thought of what I would do if that were the house of someone I knew and the emotions scared me. This was a terrible time. Everyone was scared, angry and confused, all at the same time. That is a miserable mixture of emotions, and there was no sign that we would be relieved of this terror any time soon.

Things were getting worse every day. Eventually we began to see the hopeless refugees pouring out of northern Europe. They looked so helpless and frightened. The first arrived in cars packed like a can of sardines with people and whatever valuables they were able to save. Then came the people with hand carts, and wheelbarrows, and even livestock. We did as much as we could to give them shelter and nourishment and tried to comfort

them. I knew it would only be a matter of time before our turn to flee would come.

I remember it like it was yesterday. I do not recall the exact date, but it began like any other. I woke up early, went to work, and put in my time before getting a lunch break. Sometime that afternoon, my life changed from relative normalcy, to complete chaos. It was around lunch time, and I was called to the office. When I asked my supervisor what was going on he said simply, “go away”. The Germans were going to arrive in Paris in a few hours, and it was time to leave. All mandatory service was over, and I was on my own. Having no car, and no way to communicate with friends or family, the only thing there was to do was get out of town. So I headed for the metro.

After taking the Paris Metro to the last stop, I headed for the street and the scene I stumbled upon was something I will never forget for the rest of his life. Thousands of refugees from one place or another filled the street. I didn't care for the other people when I came out of the Metro. I had enough to worry about for myself, so I just ran for my own good. The Germans didn't just occupy the individual cities piece by piece; they swept through

the entire area like a thunderstorm. There were people fleeing with whatever they could salvage from their homes which, in no time, would be overrun by the Nazi war machine. There were people with baby carriages, wheelbarrows and even a man walking with his cow. Nobody knew what fate had in store for them, and this was not a time to wait around and figure it out. Now was a time for action, and the action in this case was getting as far away from the Nazis as possible.

After witnessing this scene, being a young man of only 19 years, I began to run. I was able to run past all the people who were walking because they were not as physically fit or because they were carrying their possessions. Having nothing to carry, I just kept running until I passed the rest of the people and started to see cars. As I continued to run, the cars began moving faster and faster. Finally, when the traffic began to thin out, I managed to hitch a ride with a truck.

I never remember actually seeing the Germans, I just knew they were on my tail, and that if I stayed I would eventually see the German army, which would not be a good thing by any means.

By this time, I realized my best bet was to try to get to Bordeaux, which was on the western seaboard in the middle of the country. I figured I would get to Bordeaux and find Claude Leon, who was an officer in the

French army. Claude was Gilberte's brother, and was a lawyer in Bordeaux before joining the army. Luckily, I had written down his address one day before I parted ways with my family back in Paris just in case I was ever in the area.

The truck I managed to flag down was filled with tires. It was driven by a man who owned a tire factory back in Paris. When he heard of the swift German advance into France, he had packed up everything he could and took off.

Eventually, it became time to part ways. The man driving the truck informed me that he would make a right, and Bordeaux was to the left, so we said our goodbyes and I was on my own again. It wasn't long before I was able to flag down another truck, which was headed in the right direction. This was a large military truck, but I had papers so they let me catch a ride to Bordeaux.

Leaving Paris was very strange in the fact that there were no French military personnel to be seen of any kind. There were no soldiers in the city and no soldiers in the streets as the refugees flooded out of town. It wasn't until I was in the military truck, that I finally saw members of the French military. They were all in the woods along the side of the road and all in camouflage. The strange thing was they weren't doing anything. As the

German army flew through France, the French military, in my eyes, did nothing. I blame this all on Marshal Petain.

Every day I recall seeing French airplanes going down. It even got to the point that they were referred to as “flying coffins”. They were no match in heart or engineering.

When I got to Bordeaux, it was so full of refugees that the city had been closed. Nobody was allowed to come in except military personnel.

Claude Leon was the only person I knew in Bordeaux, and it turned out he lived a little ways outside town, so my next move was to find his place. When I got to his apartment, the landlord knew where he was. I was told he was stationed on the base in town and he could not come home. He was a lawyer, and in the French military that was sufficient to make him an Officer. So I went to the base where Claude was stationed, and after asking for him, in a matter of five minutes he was standing in front of me, completely willing to help me in any way possible. Its funny, being in the army, he knew far less than I had learned from the last few days of my adventure, but I took his keys and could not wait to get a bath and a good night sleep. It was great to see a familiar face in all the panic and worrying.

By this time, I had heard the Germans had completely taken Paris, and just as I had suspected, from what I saw during my trip to Bordeaux, the

French military was laying down for the swift moving and highly mechanized German army. I knew it wouldn't be long until the Germans reached Bordeaux and took the rest of the Western Coast.

The next day after arriving to Bordeaux, I explored the town. At one point I remember seeing some British soldiers leaving from the port. They were part of the Royal Air Force (RAF), and they were being evacuated so they could regroup and continue the fight from England. Looking back on the situation, I wish I would have just jumped on the boat and caught a free ride to England, but I didn't.

Sure enough, it wasn't more than two or three days before the Germans occupied Bordeaux. After they came, it was announced that everyone had until nightfall to get in or out of the city. The minute the sun set, the town would be shut down and nobody would be permitted to leave without the proper forms. This was my time to get away. The last thing I wanted to do as a Jew, was to get stuck in a German occupied zone. I had heard enough stories to know this was a bad idea.

With the Germans breathing down my throat, I boarded the first train I could catch. I was now headed for St. George, to hopefully meet up with Judith, Gilberte and their children who had supposedly moved to Sister Claire's monastery a couple months earlier.

On my way to catch a train out of town and attempt to make it to St. George d' Auroc, I met Victor. He was a Jew as well, but had been on the run much longer than myself, and knew a lot more about the devastation of the war than I did. There was something about Victor that I knew I could trust him right away. I have always been good with initial character judgements. It is just a feeling I get about people that is impossible to explain. Victor was coming from Poland, so I told him to come with me and we would find a way to Israel together. He was about my age, and he agreed to accompany me to St. George on our way to Marseille, where we would get on a boat to Israel together. Again, Victor knew a lot more about the seriousness of the war than I did, and knew it wouldn't be that easy. Although he was pessimistic, he kept his pessimism to himself. I have always respected that quality in people. There would be no reason for him to shatter my dreams, so he kept his mouth shut.

It was about a two hour walk from the nearest train station to where the women were, but when we arrived in the small village of St. George d' Auroc, I was pleasantly surprised. Judith, Gilberte and the three children were there and they were all safe. They were ecstatic to see me again. When I arrived the children came running to meet me and I could tell that even at such a young age they were a bit relieved to see a familiar face.

Although verifiably a little traumatized, they all seemed to be in relatively good spirits. The two women were staying in the monestary to be safe, under the watchful eye of Mother Claire, who was always looking out for other people.

Although they were relatively at ease, the looming fear of not knowing where the men were was always present. They really had no way to know if they would ever see their husbands again. I can not imagine living like that. In that moment, I felt a bit relieved to be so young with so little responsibility. It seems like a horrible thing to say, but the *every man for himself* attitude had already begun to set in. Anyway, *I* was determined not to become a selfish man no matter what circumstances came my way. That is not how I was raised and I was certainly not prepared to compromise my values no matter what obstacles life had in store for me.

After a few days of rest, Victor and I got back on our way heading south for marseille, which was the biggest city on the Meditteremen coast. I was sure if I made it there that I would either be able to catch a boat home or at least find a job and wait until the war ended.

The German army rolled through Paris on June 14, 1940, and a little over a week later, the Furer himself toured the streets. The French government had vacated the city on June 10. (paxton, 13)

Rather than showing the resolution displayed during the First World War, the French government in this case had a defeatist attitude. One major difference was that in WWI, the Battle of the Marne proved French resilience early in the fighting and boosted morale. This time, the Germans had come so quickly that if the French were to continue the fight, it would have had to be conducted from North Africa. To many, this was an undesirable, and even impossible prospect. The general consensus was that the best bet would be for France to secure a satisfactory position in a German controlled Europe. Basically, they made their decisions around the believed inevitability of German victory and their disdain for the British. They were just hoping for crumbs off Hitler's dinner table.

Very few members of the French political elite were against this stance, and a new Cabinet was formed which persuaded the French Assembly to grant them full powers. Undeterred by their promise to England not to make a separate peace with Germany, the new French Government -the Vichy regime- promptly asked for an armistice.

The day after the new government was formed, Marshall Pilippe Petain, the new Prime Minister announced, “With a heavy heart, I tell you today that it is necessary to stop the fighting.” After this, though the armistice did not take effect for another eight days, everyone gave up. French soldiers just stood around on the side of the road as all cities were declared “open” to avoid useless destruction. Under the conditions of the armistice, the part of France already occupied would stay under the Germans and the remaining part, in the Southeast, would be unoccupied and under the Vichy government. (Ryan)

Hitler was worried about spreading himself too thin and feared the combining of the French and British naval fleets. For these reasons, he left a portion of France unoccupied, but retained control of the Atlantic coast as well as the whole coast along the Channel. The French feared that if they suffered casualty numbers that compared to WWI, such a large part of the population would be wiped out that they would never be able to dig themselves out. Things could not have been working out any better for the imperialist Nazis. This was the perfect arrangement.

The debate over the actual motivations for the armistice deserves its own book. What is important, is the actions taken by this new

regime over the next two years and how these actions effected the Jews of unoccupied France, especially in the city of Marseille. By examining Vichy ideology through looking at their laws, and the reaction to these laws, one can clearly see that they were far from the innocent bystanders of a dictatorial Hitler. It would be more accurate to say that the Vichy government was a nationalist regime representing, as Ryan claims, “the return to an “older”, Catholic, paternalistic, authoritarian *patrie*, which they hoped would be prouder and mightier than the France of the 1940 defeat.” (Ryan)

The truth is, the Vichy government did everything it could to label, concentrate, impoverish, and demoralize Jews in France until they were left virtually powerless at the hands of the Nazis. There is clear evidence of deeply seeded xenophpbia and anti semitism, and we see many instances of Vichy going above and beyond Nazi Diktat. It is not a stretch to say that many Vichy officials were collaborating with the Germans because of an agreement of ideologies as much as out of necessity.

Marshal Petain sold out France... he was a traitor. It was in the air. I saw so many soldiers on the side of the road completely pacified. They were not doing anything to fight off the Germans; they were complete cowards. The majority of the gendarmerie and the police collaborated with the Germans, and almost seemed satisfied with the situation. This was extremely disappointing. The French, with such a long and powerful tradition, were completely folding.

In hindsight I can see that I was completely naïve, but at the time I really thought I would be able to just jump on a boat headed for Beirut and make my way home from there. I figured I had my papers and there was no way they would stop me. Unfortunately I was completely wrong. The Germans were way ahead of me on this one. There was no way they would let any boats go in or out of Marseille, and they had complete control of the French so these rules could be enforced without any German effort.

When Victor and I arrived in Marseille, we searched the town for accommodations, but there were none to be found. After exploring the town all day, and having no luck finding a place to stay, we were lucky enough to find a church that was giving people beds to sleep in. It was basically a homeless shelter for refugees. After waiting outside the church in line for hours, we were eventually let in, but before anything, we all had to sit and

listen to the rules: The church opened its doors at night in good faith, as a shelter. We could sleep in the beds at night, but in the morning we were on our own and could not return until the next night.

When the priest was done talking there was a scramble for beds, which were crammed into the gymnasium room. Victor and I were lucky enough to find beds to sleep in, but the living conditions were shabby at best. The beds made us itch, and it was a pretty miserable sight seeing the depressed faces of all the families who had lost their homes and everything important to them when the Germans swept through their towns.

Every day we would cruise the town, looking for accommodations or work and talking with other refugees who found themselves in similar situations. Surprisingly, amidst all the chaos there was nothing completely out of the ordinary. Granted, the population of Marseille was much larger than usual and there were a lot more homeless people, but there was not the sense of chaos that one would expect.

On the third day in Marseille, we happened to come across a Jewish Doctor named Joseph Chicanovich. He was from Lithuania and was an orthodox Jew. A short, stout man, with grey hair, but plenty of it, Joseph had the quality of showing the goodness inside him at first glance. Again, I have always thought I was a good initial judge of character, and I always

trusted my instincts. I can not explain the look, but Joseph certainly looked trustworthy. He also had the look of an educated man. You could almost see the wrinkles on his face from spending long nights peering over text books. He seemed like an all around good guy, and someone that would be a valuable friend.

I don't remember why he was in Marseille, but the Soviets had occupied his country by this time, and I can not imagine they were very benevolent. After talking for a while in Hebrew, which Chicanovich spoke fluently, the doctor proposed to split the rent of a hotel room he had found. The deal was that two would share the bed and the third would take the floor, and the rent would be split three ways. I decided my place would be on the floor and the arrangement began immediately.

The three of us managed to get along very well in those early weeks. We all had the mutual respect for each other necessary to live in such tight quarters in such a difficult time. We would talk about our homes, and the things we liked to do before the war. The two men were always interested in hearing about Palestine. Eretz Israel had been important to the Jewish people, and everyone, not only Victor and the doctor, were infatuated with my stories. I feel like the Jewish refugees in Marseille really respected me because I was from Israel.

At this point, I had not found work, so Victor and I would get our meals from a group of nuns once a day. This was just for lunch, but it was certainly better than nothing. These nuns ran something like a soup kitchen. We would wait around in the street and once a day they would open their doors to refugees who could not afford to eat. While I talk about how little the French did to halt the German advance and how much I feel the Vichy Government sold out, I am certainly not trying to indict everyone. There were certainly many French people who went out of their way to help myself and others in similar situations. As in any situation, one can not generalize the behavior of a whole nation, and to this day I realize that without the help of many good hearted, caring, benevolent people that I crossed paths with, I would not be alive to tell this story.

Those days I was very careful with the little money I had. Not having an income, and the fact that I had to come up with money to pay off my hotel room left me little money for recreational fun. I really did not eat much those days, but nobody did. I think everyone was a little more humble back then anyway. This was before the cadillacs and the big suburban houses of the 1950's. Most families were still trying to get on their feet, and most governments were trying to use every resource they had to win this

terrible war. Not to mention the terrible, world wide depression of the previous decade.

Everyone new to the town was required at the time to register as a refugee. I went to the office like everyone else, and they would put us in the books, and give us our coupons for food. All the refugees would receive coupons for food once a week. Although I felt the French were racist, the Jewish refugees received coupons just like everyone else. At this point, there was no issue about religion. I don't even think they asked me anything about my religion at this first registration.

After canvassing the town for weeks, I found an agency set up to help refugees find work. It was there, that I got the opportunity to continue studying mechanics. They set me up with a mechanics school, and after a month or so, I got my diploma and was sent to a shop to apply for a job.

When I got there I talked to the owner of the shop, and was informed that there were four other applicants for the same position. Being a fair man, and realizing the desperation of all the applicants, the owner decided the only fair way to figure out who to employ was to test our skills. We were all told to come back to the shop the next day for a test. I felt confident, but a

little worried at the same time. I did not know any of the other applicants, so I had no way to know what my competition would be like.

The next day I showed up, and we were given our instructions. We were given certain specifications, and we had to make a screw out of raw materials. I knew exactly what I was doing, and although I was certainly a little nervous, I finished well before any of my competition. The quality was determined by seeing if a certain nut would fit the thread of the screw I had made. I was perfect, and the owner of the shop told me to come in Monday morning at 6 am to start work.

There were two shifts, and two mechanics. The first would work from six in the morning until 2 in the afternoon, when the next guy would come in and work until ten at night. I was working beside a French man who was a native of Marseille. His family had a farm out in the country and he had moved to the city for some added income in those hard times. We would switch shifts after every week. We never really became friends in those early days, but we were cordial. It really came down to the fact that when the relief would show up, the guy working the first shift would be so tired he really did not have the time or the patience to stay and hang out.

People would come in with a broken part, or some other problem, and we would take a look at what was going on, and make them the new part they needed. It was not hard for me; that was what I was best at.

Pierre, my co worker, was a tall, skinny, Frenchman, with jet black hair and a chizzed face. He had the mannerisms of a country boy, and you could tell he grew up on a farm. Always perfectly polite and respectful, with good morales, and uncompromising values. He also worked like a horse, which I also attributed to his growing up on a farm. He had no interest in being around the city any more than he had to, and would bike home without hesitation every day. No matter how different we might have been, there was always a mutual respect, and everything went smoothly.

France had already been rationing food, but there were farmers markets, where people could pick up whatever extra food they needed. One day Pierre proposed a deal to me. Apparently, his family had a truck and they needed him to drive the food they grew to the farmers market for some extra cash. The problem was, every other week he had to take the morning shift, and couldn't go. So the deal was, I would take over the morning shift permanently, and he would make it worth my while by giving me some vegetables here and there for my troubles. I had no problem with this,

because I enjoyed having the afternoons off, and a little extra food wasn't hurting anyone those days.

One day I woke up and the Doctor was gone... Apparently, he had found a visa to the United States and just left. This perfectly reveals the mind set of the times. In those days of trouble, nobody really talked about what their plans were out of fear of saying the wrong thing to the wrong person. Not that the doctor didn't trust us, it was more a sign of the times. As much as you became friends with someone, it was still every man for himself, and it really wasn't fair to expect too much loyalty out of anyone. So Joseph just picked up and left, but I did not take it personally. I assume they needed all the doctors they could get in the United States, and if he wasn't allowed to work where he was, they probably gave him a visa with little trouble.

So now it was just Victor and I, but we were getting along fine, and we both had enough money saved up to be able to afford the room.

I met many people in the next few months around the town of Marseille. Many of whom would become close friends. During the day, we

would swim in the ocean, go for hikes in the mountains around town, or sit around and talk about our lives before the war.

I had one regrettable experience in the early days living in Marseille. I was still determined to get home to Israel, although I certainly realized it was not going to be as easy as I had initially believed. I had met two men, one named Freddie Spielman, and one named Isaac Varga. They were my age, and were determined, like myself, to get out of France. They would go anywhere, they just did not want to be anywhere near the Nazis, even if the Nazis *weren't actually* in Marseille.

They were always brainstorming ways to get away and one day they came to me with a plan. They had met some guy who was organizing a boat to Beirut for refugees looking to escape. The deal was... we would all meet in the middle of the night, at a certain coffee shop, where their connection would pick us up. We would then pay the driver whatever the fee was, and he would take us to the boat, which would then take us to Beirut.

Everything went smoothly in the planning, and although I was a little reluctant to give the driver the money up front, Isaak and Freddie convinced me they had a flawless connection. The driver took us to the port, where,

there was a guard making sure nobody came or went, because shipping was highly monitored out of the port during the war years. So the driver told the guard a password, and we were granted access to the port area. The driver then proceeded to a large ocean liner, dropped us off, and told us to wait in a certain room on the boat. We were also told to be very quiet and not to draw any attention to ourselves; the boat would leave in the morning. We thanked the man, and he left us.

We were very quiet that night, because who would want to mess up this opportunity of a life time. It was dark and uncomfortable in the tiny room we were in, but we all did our best to keep our cool and not mess this up. Keeping quiet for a night in an uncomfortable room seemed a small price to pay for the reunion with my family and friends in Israel that I expected was only a few days away.

In the morning, we waited anxiously for the boat to move. As the day began to progress, I began having doubts on the validity of Freddie and Isaak's connection, but I kept my mouth shut, not wanting to sound like a whiner. By mid afternoon I was getting hungry, thirsty and a little cranky, and started to express my doubts in their *brilliant* plan to get out of France. By the time it got dark, I had had enough. Although the two of them begged me to wait and have faith in their plan, I was fed up. I got up and left. I had

given up, and rightly so. They were completely conned by their “connection” and I was ready to cut my losses and save the embarrassment of spending another night crammed in a little cabin without speaking.

Honestly, as strange as it may sound, things really got back to relative normalcy for a while. People were trying to track down loved ones and get home as soon as possible. I think it has something to do with the denial issue of the times. Nobody thought of themselves as the victim. It was more like everyone thought they could just wait out this war that was happening because of other people, in other places, of other races and religions. Nobody ever thought they would be next.

After the Armistice, most French people tried to get back to normal life as quickly as possible. Most made their way back home or sought shelter in somewhere safer. “The most elementary promptings of normalcy in the summer of 1940, the urge to return to home and job, started many frenchmen down a path of everyday complicity that led gradually and eventually to active assistance to German measures undreamed of in 1940.” (paxton, 39)

It was not long before the Vichy Government began to institute laws hurting the Jews living in the unoccupied zone of France, proving that although the Germans did not have the manpower to enforce racism on the French Jews, it would be sufficient to let the French do it (Weis. Xxi). In the next few years thousands of influential Frenchmen would work to: develop an official definition of Jewishness; exclude Jews from various careers and activities; “aryanize” property; arrest and encamp Jews; begin steps toward deportation (weis. 2).

It took no time for this new regime to begin considering questions of nationality and race. Again, this was not demanded by the Nazis. While many collaborators and their defenders blamed Nazi pressure for their actions in the years following the war, no documentation of this has come forth, except memoirs from officials that would benefit from a viable alibi (ryan 27). On the contrary, Vichy ordinances seem to be more representative of the ideology of the new government than anything else. In early October, the Vichy government passed statutes establishing the french definition of “Jew”, listed careers unacceptable for Jews, and legalized the internment of foreign Jews in concentration camps.

It is interesting to note here that the French definition of “Jew” was more encompassing than even the German ruling. On September 27, 1940, a German ordinance made its classification for the occupied territories (although the Nazis had ample experience writing discriminatory laws aimed at Jews by this point in time, the delay here can be credited to the competition among top Nazi officials for control over the newly occupied territories (ryan 28)). While according to the Nazis you were considered Jewish if you had at least three Jewish grandparents, in unoccupied France, you were Jewish if you had at least two grandparents who were Jewish and you were married to a Jew. This is a clear example of Vichy racism.

Jews were eventually removed from all areas of public life where they might influence public opinion in any way. Even Jews from old French families lost their high ranking military assignments, teaching posts, and prestigious jobs in the press, radio, film, and theatre industries (ryan 25). This seems like a deliberate act of good faith- helping Hitler exterminate Jews- due to hopes of securing a place for France in Hitler’s new Europe (ryan 29).

It is also interesting to note, as far as the future of the war, that the Marchandreau Law of April 1939, was repealed in the early Vichy

days. This law had previously outlawed press attacks based on religion or race. All this did was open the floodgates for propaganda, which was a major piece of Axis strategy.

The new government particularly focused internment of foreign Jews on the German and Austrian refugees (ryan 26). While the idea was to decrease social control for native jews, foreign Jews were to be completely eliminated from this new France (ryan 26). It has been argued that Hitler never saw France as an integral part of his New Europe, but more of a dumping ground for Jews living in the Great Reich (ryan 28). There were many instances of Jews being transported to the Unoccupied Zone of France, which was seriously deplored by the Vichy regime.

Quota laws/census/registration???

The next step was to create government agencies to enforce this new racist ideology. Unoccupied France soon saw everything from the establishment of a General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs to the creation of the Police for Jewish Affairs. With rigid laws and an extensive bureaucracy in place, Vichy was on its way to lowering the overall status of Jews and making them all the more vulnerable to Hitler's long-term plans.

Maybe stuff on communists and foreign born??

Statutes of early June, 1941 would give the French definition of Jewdaism an even more precise definition (more on ryan 34), and more importantly it would require every Jew to register at their local prefecture for a new census. The law required all Jews in the Unoccupied Zone to report name, age, nationality, address, and all important economic information on every Jewish member of their household. Penalties for failure to comply with these new regulations were quite stiff (ryan 39). The census was taken in order to innact a new set of quota laws, which would effect just about every important profession and University enrollment. Although it varied, the quota tended to be between 2 and 3 percent of the profession.

One day I was getting home from work and received the surprise of a lifetime. I was walking into our hotel room, like any other day, and sitting on the bed reading a book was my brother George. Apparently he had gotten my address from the refugee agency. After getting over the initial shock and excitement of the moment, we went to the café across the street to share stories over a cup of coffee. When George told me what he had been

through the past few months I felt like I was hearing a fairy tale. Could this really be happening to my family and I? We were all so normal. The things George had been through seemed like they were a dream. I could not believe this was really how far things had gone in such a short period of time.

George enlisted in the army, and was stationed on the Maginot line. This was France's solution to their problems from WWI. Thinking the next war would be similar to the last, they figured the Maginot Line would be sufficient to halt the advancement of an attacking German infantry. With the Ardennes Forest covering the border of Belgium, they thought they were safe.

When the Germans came through France, and took the Maginot line from the rear, where they were completely unprotected, George and his men didn't stand a chance. When the Germans came, they made the French soldiers pack up all the leftover weapons to be shipped to Germany, and then they were taken as prisoners.

Packed into boxcars, they were shipped off to Germany, to destinations unknown. In Germany, George wound up on a farm, being forced to help out the German war effort. The farm was all women because

the men were all fighting. After becoming familiar with their surroundings, George, and a man he was working with found their way out.

They had come across some left-over civilian clothes in the farm, and hid them. Then, when the time was right, they took the clothes and whatever food they could round up and took off. After finding a train, they realized that the driver was french. So they talked with the conductor for a while, and he eventually agreed to let them work in the coal room until the train made it back to France. When they got to France, George took a train to marseille, and out of pure luck and coincidence, was able to find where Victor and I had been living.

He looked as if he had been to Hell and back. This story made me feel lucky. There was obviously tremendous joy in our reunion, but I knew that what really made George's day was to hear that his wife and daughter were safe, and living in St. George d'Auroc with Judith, her children, and sister Marie. He certainly wanted to stay and chat with me, but I could tell his priorities were set. It had been so long since he had seen his wife and daughter, and the second he found out where they were, he was out the door, and on a train to St. George d' Auroc.

It did not take long for Hitler and the Nazis to stray from their agreement with the Soviets to share the Continent. In the early hours of June 22, the German army launched a complete surprise attack on the Soviet Union in the East. Because of the unexpectedness of the attack, as well as the experience the Nazis had gained in previous fighting, they were able to obtain all of their initial goals. They destroyed a large portion of the Soviet Air Force on the ground, damaged their forward air fields, and shot down most of the Red Air Force that managed to get in the air (wein 264). This initial dominance of the air did not last long, but it served its purpose as it greatly facilitated the advancement of the all-important German ground forces.

Launching a three pronged attack in the North, Central and Southern regions of the Russian border, the Germans were able to capture and kill huge numbers of Soviet soldiers as well as destroy enormous amounts of military equipment. The swiftness was crucial for the Germans because even they, with their overinflated confidence, did not want to begin a campaign across the thousands of miles of Soviet frontier land. They were out to crush the Soviets as fast as possible, with hopes of destroying morale and toppling the whole Soviet Structure (wein 265).

The attack consisted of three million German soldiers and more than a half million soldiers from countries allied with Germany. Although these figures seem more than substantial, the leaders of Germany planned for a quick war in the East, and paid no attention to replacements of men or equipment after the first few weeks (wein 266). Should the Soviets be able to hold off the Blitzkrieg even for a short period, the Germans would not be sitting as pretty as they were at the outset of fighting. While the German leadership thought it was just a matter of mopping up, the men in the field were beginning to get a taste of the Soviets bravery and dedication.

The night of the initial attack, in a dramatic broadcast, Winston Churchill welcomed the Soviet Union into the anti-Hitler coalition and pledged to help the Soviet cause in any way possible (Herring 3). Churchill was well aware of the strength of the German army and realized at this point that everyone apposed to the Nazis would need to work with the Soviets and fight the Germans on two fronts.

On July 3, the German Army Chief of Staff, General Franz Halder, wrote in his diary: “On the whole, one can say that the assignment of smashing the mass of the Russian army before the Dvina and Dnepr [rivers] has been fulfilled... It is possible that the campaign

against Russia has been won within two weeks.” The Germans had always viewed the Russians as inferior Slavs directed by incompetent Jewish Bolsheviks. Their land would soon become the *lebensraum* (“living space”) Hitler sought for his people.

Mass execution of Jews accompanied the German advance into Soviet territories, foreshadowing the next phases of the German plan, which would become more clear later in the war. It was not only Jews either. The Germans severely mistreated civilians and captured soldiers, and it was not long before word spread back to the homefront. This did nothing but fuel the Russian will to keep up the fight.

Another interesting aspect of the early German confidence in their campaign in the East was that Hitler made orders to reorient the armaments program to the Navy and the Air Force. Seeing no need to worry about the East, he wanted to focus his attention on control of the Atlantic and the conquest of England (wein 268). This arrogance would prove costly.

The Germans eventually spread their forces too thin, and did not have the means to keep the supply lines open. For this reason, Hitler decided to split the Central thrust in two, and focus on Leningrad in the North, and Moscow in the South.

The Soviets were able to hold off this onslaught in the coming months, but it was only a matter of time before the Germans reloaded and made another attempt. One very important part of the stalemate was the siege of Leningrad.....

When George got back, he had more shocking news for me. It turns out Joseph had made his way to St. George d' Auroc after being released from duty when the Vichy government signed the armistice. Not only had he been reunited with his family, but he had been able to set up a makeshift practice, for there were no other doctors in the town. From George's report, things were as normal as could be up there, and he reported that everyone in the town loved Joseph. They had plenty to eat from the women growing food in the garden, and Joseph was back doing what he loved: helping people.

Like all good news, this was accompanied by some less enticing information. Apparently, in his travels, George had found out about a group of resistance fighters in the mountains. He told me he would stay with me for a few days, but after that he would be off to help with the resistance.

This worried me, but I understood his conviction to stop the Germans and restore France's glory.

I had heard a few things here and there about these resistance groups, but again, nobody talked much. You never knew when you could accidentally say the wrong thing to the wrong person, and this was too much to risk. People kept things quiet and secretive, and were always watching their back. Everyone knew the Gestapo could come any day, and you didn't want to open your door one morning to a couple SS guards with questions for you.

So after a few relieving days of spending time with my brother, he was off to meet up with the guerilla group in the mountains. It was good to see him and I completely understood his need to help.

Like I said, things in Marseille really got back to relative normalcy. I had a job, and every day I would get work over with early in the morning and have the rest of the afternoon to enjoy myself. I met plenty of friends, and we would spend the afternoons at the beach, swimming and taking hikes in the mountains surrounding the town.

The propaganda was so good those days that people never really felt threatened. I remember people thinking that if they just went and worked in Germany for a few months, they would be alright. This was obviously not the case.

The Germans had such great psychologists. They were committing all of these atrocities right under everyone's nose, but it didn't matter. It was for too often that I would hear people say, "so what, I will go to Germany to work for a couple of months and when I get back everything will be alright." This was such a ridiculous outlook, but the propaganda of the Germans at the time was so good that people were convinced they were just fine when in reality they were on the verge of death. It was like plankton just swimming into the wide-open mouth of a whale. A deportment to Germany for "labor" was surely a death sentence, but somehow they convinced people everything was alright. I knew better.

When I was still living in Israel, I befriended a boy named Felix Bach. His father had been the Foreign Minister of Germany, but after Hitler took power, his family fled to Israel. They were Jewish, and knew very early that there was no place for them in Hitler's government.

Another friend from back in Israel had fled Germany with his family because his father was a professor. Just like Bach's, they had come to Israel

to escape the persecution that was beginning to build in Germany. Nobody who was Jewish had a place in public life.

The memories of seeing German doctors driving cabs in Israel stuck with me, and furthermore, taught me a valuable lesson. These were brilliant doctors, who were forced to leave their old lives behind and raise chickens in Israel simply because they were Jewish. If things in Germany were this bad in the mid-30's, I couldn't imagine what it would be like this far into the war. I had also heard the stories of Kristallnacht and other German offenses against Jews, and knew that there was a problem.

So even when things seemed so normal, I never really trusted the façade. I was always skeptical. While most people were overwhelmed by the propaganda, I felt like I was one of the few who never bought it. I knew too much to be so naïve. For these reasons, the propaganda did not effect me the way it did the others, and I never once saw a trip to Germany as a temporary inconvenience.

Although there were a few who were against the Germans, for the most part, I felt strong anti-semitism everywhere in France. I believe this inbred antisemitism was a big factor in formation of the Vichy regime and the subsequent persecution of refugees in Vichy.

There were songs taught in the grade schools praising Petain. Ben even sang one for me. Before the war, I had never even heard of Petain.

I don't remember why I didn't attempt to get a visa and go about my problems diplomatically. I went to the American consul in Marseille and he gave me a certificate saying I had the right to go back to Israel, but this wouldn't do much. I was stupid, I don't know why I didn't try to go through Spain and Portugal and then try to get back to Israel.

One of my friends back then was a very important Frenchman named Isaac. He was the authority on collectible stamps in France. If there was a dispute on a valuable stamp in court, he was the man that would be brought in for the expert opinion.

My closest friends from Marseille during the early years of the war was a man named Willie Huber. Willie was from We got along particularly well because of all the people I met in those days we had the most in common. We both enjoyed hiking in the mountains, and we could confide in each other about women. Every young man has friends, but there is usually one that you really connect with enough so they can help you with women. Women can confuse the hell out of a 20 something and there has to

be someone there to help you at least attempt to figure them out. Anyway, that was Willie.

Things were still going well with Victor and I, and our living situation was perfect. The doctor had left, but I was making enough money to support myself just fine.

Those days it was virtually impossible to find work, especially if you were a foreigner like Willie and Victor. If you didn't have French citizenship, you basically had to just do whatever odd jobs you could find in order to make some money here or there. So Willie and Victor used to unload trucks down by the port. This situation went well for a while, but one day Victor saw a sign advertising job opening in northern France, and left. Like I said, in those days there were friendships just like any other time, but loyalty was hard to come by, and you really couldn't blame anyone for a lack of it. The world was so messed up that all you could do was fend for yourself and hope for the best. So when Victor saw an opportunity to find work somewhere else, he was gone. Unfortunately, this left me with a fairly expensive hotel room to live in without any roommates.

Luckily, right around the time Victor left to work in the North, Willie was looking for a new roommate. This was perfect, so the two of us got a hotel room down near the water. I am sure Victor went North to work and

founds things a lot different than he expected. I can only hope that things worked out. I never heard from him again.

I have had relationships with many women in my long life, but one very important woman was named Hilda, who I met in Marseille. She worked in a building near the beach, so after work, I would ride m bike down to the water and meet her. It was the same place every day. We would talk and swim and find time to relax a little. She was working to support her entire family. They were refugees from -----, and nobody else was able to find work. She also sold paintings She would use her paycheck and whatever money she could make from selling her paintings.

One day, Hilda proposed to me. Her plan was that I would move in with her family, and we would use her money to support her family and then save my earnings for the two of us to enjoy. Although I definetly had feelings for Hilda, this wasn't the right time.

I remained friends with Hilda even after I refused her proposal and we would still hike in the mountains around Marseille every weekend. We actually did this so much that I think I knew the area better than most people who were born in the city.

Later, when I was in Israel at my art gallery, I ran into her cousin.

Hilda was still in France, and this man (her cousin) was on his way there to marry her and bring her back to Israel. Knowing she must still have feelings for me, I told her cousin to tell Hilda that I was already married. I lied, but I thought if she was under the impression that I was taken, it would prevent her from ever second guessing her own marriage to this other man, who seemed like a good guy.

As normal as we tried to make life, we all knew, deep down, that things were not normal, and certainly wouldn't be for a while. One day though, we received some shocking news. Willie had gotten his girlfriend pregnant. I feel terrible speaking of an occasion like that as a bad thing, but that was the last thing anyone wanted to worry about it those days. Nobody wanted to be stuck with the responsibility of supporting a family, but Willie was a stand up guy and definitely not the type to run from his responsibilities. That was probably why we were such good friends in those days. I really respect people who take care of what has to be done and don't complain about it. Anyway, Willie ended up marrying the woman, her name was Gussie.

On my way to work one day I noticed there were posters all over town telling all the Jewish people they had to register themselves. We were told to go to the closest government office immediately.

I went after work that day and waited in line to register like I was supposed to. I didn't want to make anyone mad, so I just did what I was told. After filling out the appropriate paper work, I was given a receipt. This was the little yellow Star of David.

It was at this point that people started to be taken by the SS. I knew about past atrocities like Kristallnacht and from stories I heard from the Germans I knew who escaped, but it was after this day that things got bad in front of my face. It became relatively normal to wake up in the morning and realize someone you knew had been taken by the Nazis in the middle of the night.

It was at this point that I knew I had to do something.

When Willie had his baby, he became very worried for the safety of his family. I had actually been thinking about this situation for some time by then, and I had an idea. A couple months earlier, I had found a cave in the coast side of the mountains. I stumbled across found this one day while hiking with Hilda. It had a water source and protection from the elements of nature. The plan was for Willie, his wife and their son to stay in the cave

and live off food that I would bring up to them. This cave was a long hike from town, but I had found a way to access it through a train tunnel.

Although it was very dangerous to get through the tunnel, this was a great way for the family of three to be accessible for me, but far enough from town to be safe.

Pierre still owed me a favor for taking his shift at the shop, so I asked him for a little extra food, so I could bring it to Willie and his family in the cave.

There was a park in the center of town where refugees would congregate. They would buy, sell and trade everything they had or could make. It was very common for people to make little trinkets out of scraps they could find, and then sell their goods or trade them for something they needed. I wound up becoming pretty close with a lot of people living in this park. They loved my stories of Israel and my young enthusiams for life. When the stars were issued I went straight to these refugees and told them to be careful. I knew bad things were coming and they would certainly be the first to go. When I told them this, they told me I was crazy. They said they were making money and doing just fine how they were. They would wait

till the war ended and then just get back to normal life. I couldn't convince them otherwise, so I left.

That was when I decided to take matters into my own hands. Nobody was taking any sort of leadership roles, and I figured I would at least do my best. I did not want to have any regrets, so I stepped up to the plate and made up my mind that I would do anything and everything I could to get people out of France.

So when I decided to try and help people escape, the first place I went was to Mr. Isaac, because he was the most powerful man I knew in the area. I asked him what he thought I should do and he told me to see a specific priest at a church in the south part of marseille. Ben told him that he should take his family and get out, but Isaac said, "Me, who would touch me. The government knows me, the police know me, the judges know me... who would touch me?". By the end of the war, Isaac, his wife, and his daughter were all killed.

SO I went to seek out this priest. I aproached him when he no service was in session and introduced myself. When I told him I was sent by Mr. Isaac I got a great reaction. He told me Mr. Isaac was his best friend and he asked me what I needed from him. SO I told him that I wanted to help people escape through switzerland. Again, he gave me great response. He

said, “Oh yeah, we can get people out of here, but...”. When he said but, I knew things were not good, and I was filled with rage. He continued “Jewish people are rich, and we need a new bell and we need to get some repairs done. So we will help people escape but you will be charged by the person”. I can not remember being as enraged as I was at that point. I lashed out. “Shame on you. You think the war is over but it is not. You have a chance to help people but you won’t. You need money for it. I hope a bomb falls on this church with you in it.” After this, I just ran away. I was disgusted in the lack of humanity.

So I went back to Mr. Isaac seeking more help. I knew that nobody could go to border except the people who lived there. So I asked Mr. Isaac if he knew any doctors that could help me. Mr. Isaac was a pharmacist before the war, so he knew people and sent me to a certain doctor who could help me.

When I went to this doctor, he had the same initial reaction as the priest. After introducing myself, he said he was a great friend of Mr. Isaac’s and asked me what I needed. It only took a few words out of my mouth before he immediately knew what I was getting at. He went straight for the typewriter. The first thing he did, was write down all the higher decorations he had from WWI. This man had everything. Most people had one or two,

but he had them all. After that, and then noting his qualifications as a doctor, he wrote that I was very sick and had to go to the mountains for 3 or 4 months.

So I took this to the government office to get a stamp on the letter to verify its authenticity. When I showed the men the letter with his credentials on it they were astonished by his decorations from the war. They were so surprised, that they called the doctor for verification. When they contacted him, he backed it all up, and I got my stamp from the government that said it was a real letter.

So now I was one step closer to my goal of getting people out of Vichy France. So my next step was to find out how to get out of France. The first step was to take a train to ----- . From there, I had to take another train to get close to the border. After checking it out, I learned that there were guards on the trains when there was a connection from marseille, but they wouldn't be on the trains that were only for the population of the area.

So I realized that if I was to get people to switzerland, I would have to find a place to wait for a train that would not have guards on it. SO I approached a farmer. I went up to his house, and told him that I would like to use his house for -----, which was the french term for leisure time. I was basically asking if I could use his farm to have some drinks and some

food while I was hiking. I tried to give him some money for this, but he refused my offer and told me to feel free to use his land whenever I was in town. I knew I was in the right place.

So I went straight back to marseille and had my friend dora and her sister help me organize refugees to help them escape. I made it clear that they should be very secretive about this. It was very important that they keep quiet about what was going on, but also to be very careful about letting people get suspicious while they were on their way. It was very important that they all go in small groups to buy the train tickets, and to see where I was going and follow me in small groups. The plan was to go in groups of fifty. I would show them the way, and then return back to marseille for another group.

So we would take the train to -----, then take the next train. But here we were smart enough not to take the next train to the end, because that was surely heavily guarded. So we would get off, and then walk thorough the mountains until we hit the border. At the border, they would go in, and I would turn back. There were signs marking the border, so we knew when we were safe.

It seemed like all the refugees in marseille knew me. I was known as the guy from Israel.

The next time I took a group a fifty, it worked perfectly again. I got everyone over, but when I came back I ran into trouble. I was caught by three Gendarmes, and taken to their office. There, they asked me for my papers. I showed them my papers, and they asked me what I was doing there. So I showed them the note from the doctor and they said, “ah... you’re sick, go on your way.” It was as I was on my way out of the office when, for the first time in my life, I denied being Jewish. I said, “no, I’m Muslim.” Immediately after I told them that, their mood changed. Because the arabs were supplying the Germans with oil, they couldn’t be touched, and these men knew that. After I told them I was Muslim it was almost like they were suddenly subordinated. So they let me go on my way and I had no more troubles with them.

It was around this time, that George made another trip to St. George d’ Auroc. This time too, he came back with shoking news. It turns out, when the Vichy Government banned Jhews from practicing medicine, Joseph was prohibited form being a doctor, and had gone to fight with a resistance group somewhere in the mountains.

When ----- went up in the mountains to fight with the resistance, he wound up with a group of around 250 people. They were living up in the mountains. When the day came that they went to fight the

German's ----- was very sick. Although he was very sick, he demanded to fight along with the rest. Seeing his passion to be involved, and his sickness, his companions locked him in a room, and went to fight. It turned out that thus was a blessing in disguise. There was apparently a traitor in the group, and the Germans were waiting for them when they came. It ended up as a slaughter. Out of the 250 who went to fight, only 2? Returned. When they let him out, they went to join another group in another part of the mountains.

I never really had any problems. Willie brought his baby on the first trip, but the three month old was good at keeping quiet. On the second trip, there was a six year old boy, who made a little noise, but not much. It was when we were running through the mountains that he became an issue. So I just threw the kid over my shoulder and carried him the rest of the way.

On my third trip, I saw the three with the gendarmes from far off. I told the people to wait for me in a hiding spot in the mountains and to wait until I returned. SO I approached the three gendarmes. We talked a little, and then they asked me if I had seen a group of people around. They said they were after them. So I said, "oh yeah, I saw a big group a little while ago." They were very excited and asked me where they were. So I pointed to a far

off hill directly in the opposite direction of where I wanted to go. Almost before I could get the words out of my mouth, they were off, and I was able to go get the group and take them to the border.

It was after the fourth trip that the letter came. It said if I missed one more hour of work, I would be put on the top of the list of people to be sent to work in Germany. The next day, the big red letter came, and I knew it was time for me to get out of the country. I don't know how they knew about me, but they surely did.

I had to go on my mission to Switzerland, and the next day he received a letter that said if he missed one more hour of work, he would be put as the first name on the list of people to be shipped off for mandatory work in Germany. He surely believes that this would mean death. The next day, a larger packet came in the mail. This was it. He received his his train ticket, and direct orders from the minister of labor of the Vichy Government that he would be sent to work in Germany. He was told when to arrive at the station. This was when he made the decision to go to Spain. He knew that working in Germany meant death.

Roosevelt knew something had to be done in the war against Germany in 1942. It was almost certain the Germans would make another push East, which made it essential to keep Stalin happy in order to keep the German army in a war of two fronts. Should Stalin think we were not serious, he might look for other avenues out of the war, rather than continue the fight and cooperating with the US and Great Britain. After seeing the route the French took when their backs were against the wall, this became even more important. It was also important at this time for Roosevelt to keep the American people committed to the cause in Europe. After all, they were called upon to make a lot of concessions during the war years and it was important to keep up their morale.

After throwing around a couple different ideas, including an invasion of Norway and a cross channel invasion of France, it was decided that Operation “Torch”, a landing on French Northwest Africa, would be scheduled for later that year. This would serve a couple purposes. First of all, it would hopefully ease the terrible shipping shortages by removing the Axis from the area. Also, if the British halt the Germans in Egypt and make a push from the East, it might be possible to squeeze the axis powers out of North Africa all together and

open up a route through Italy. Finally, if successful, Hitler would be forced to transfer troops from the extremely important battle of Stalingrad. It was planned for all this to happen and to be accompanied by the continued buildup of American forces in England for the ever important cross channel invasion which was now put off until 1943.

Hitler was bitter ever since the embarrassing standstill he had wound up in with the Soviets during his first push East. Because of his drastic underestimation of Russian capabilities and passion for fighting, he had found himself in a stalemate and was now out for revenge. The previous winter had stopped his advance, but he would surely be back for revenge, this time focusing on the precious city of Stalingrad.

Although he was stubborn in many aspects of military strategy, Hitler learned from his mistakes in 1941 and came back with a different attitude in 1942. He still believed his army would cruise through Russia, but realized it was a better idea to concentrate his troops on fewer, more critical areas. The plan was set, and in the summer of 1942 he made another attempt eastward. This time he focussed on the Caucasus in the south and on the city of Stalingrad, just North of these mountains.

The battle for Stalingrad became one of the most important phases of the war. Beyond the psychological ramifications for the Soviet people coming from the name of the city, Hitler had already explained that the next goal would be the Caspian Sea (see map). Had the Soviets not been able to hold the city, the outcome of the war would have surely been very different, and who knows what the world would be like today.

Also in the summer of 1942, the battle taking place for control over North Africa became important. After seesawing for nearly two years between Libya and Egypt, control over the region came down to the battle of El Alamein. This pitted British General Bernard Montgomery against German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel. Should the Germans push through the British defenses and into Alexandria, it would be disastrous. That would have opened up the Suez Canal, the Saudi Arabian oil fields, and Palestine, where Jews would have been left helpless against the Germans (*wein 351) The British, who had retreated into Egypt set up a line of defense in an area where the Germans could not flank them, but had to go through their defenses. After Four months of bitter fighting, the allies finally managed to force the Axis out of Egypt, back through Libya, and into Tunisia.

While Egypt and the battle of El Alamein was for Montgomery and the British forces to worry about, the Red Army had its hands full with the German push through the Caucasus. Things did not look good for them, as their soldiers were retreating, and some of the towns being taken over were foolishly collaborating with the Germans, hoping to receive better treatment from Berlin than from Moscow (wein 420). By the time, Montgomery began pushing towards Tunisia, the Battle of Stalingrad changed drastically. Now that

At the same time Montgomery and the British 8th army was pushing the Germans into Tunisia from the East, Operation Torch landed in Northwest Africa, and the US began to push German troops into Tunisia from the West.

The Allies broke the Axis lines at El Alamein, on November 1, 1942. A week later, the Americans arrived in North Africa. Three days after the US invasion of North Africa, the Germans and the Italians invaded Unoccupied Vichy France. With the increasing Allied strength in North Africa, they could no longer rely on the Vichy Government. The opening of French North Africa to the eagerly waiting Free French movement headed by General Charles De Gaulle made the Vichy government useless. Eight days after the Germans occupied the

previously unoccupied area of France, the Russians began their incredible counter attack in the Battle of Stalingrad. The ability of the Russians to counter attack was largely due to Stalin's motivational leadership, and partly due to the fact that Hitler had to use valuable men from that front to deal with his two new disasters in North Africa.

I knew my Switzerland escapades were up, and so I was off to Perpignan by bus. On the bus to Perpignan, there were Gendarmes guarding Gypsies. That was when I heard, from 10 inches away, a Gendarm bragging that they could smell a Jew from 100 yards away. Because the bus was packed, Ben found himself right next to the Gendarme

When I arrived in Perpignan there was no place to sleep. I went to every hotel and couldn't find a bed. Finally, magic struck. As I stepped into the last hotel, I must have taken three steps before the power went out. All the people wanted to get the lights turned back on but the manager just told them to light candles until the morning when he could find someone to fix it. I told the manager I could fix his problem if he gave me a place to sleep. Luckily, I was able to figure his problem out with little trouble. So he took me to the attic where I was able to sleep on some old mattresses.

The next morning, after fixing the problem, I went out to the street. That day, the Germans came through Perpignon. I still was able to walk through the street with the Germans in town. For some reason, everyone I talked to was very forthcoming with whatever information they had. There was just some reason that people felt they could trust me. I think it could have something to do with being from Israel, but I don't know.

So I spent the entire day collecting information. I did this, in Perpignon, with the Germans there, until November 17th. I knew at this point that I had to help myself. I had nothing left, and there was only one thing to do. I had to get to Spain. This was no easy task, but I found out about a little town on the border where I could find a priest that would show me where to cross the border safely.

The first thing I did, was buy a compass. I knew that I also needed a map. I had the skills from my scout group and knew how to get around alone in the mountains. There was one map that I needed to get. It was Michelin #81. I also knew there was a little village on the border that had a bus going to it. As much as I tried, I could not find the map. Nobody had it. The police knew this was vital to escape so they confiscated all of them.

So finally I went to a big department store to continue my search. There were a couple of German soldiers in there buying things. Their

families had nothing back in Germany, because everything went into the war. So I went up to the woman and asked her for the map, and she said wait. I knew exactly what she meant. SO I stepped aside and waited until the Germans left.

The moment they left, I aproached the woman and asked her again. When I asked, she said, “why?”

Now this threw me off. I was not expecting a question like that and was struggling for an answer. I knew that if I did not tell her, she wouldn’t sell me the map, but I also knew if I told, her, there was a chance she would turn me in to the Germans, who were everywhere. SO I was feeling good, and luck had already been on my side. I did have a free place to stay in a crowded town. SO I told her I was going to try and cross the frontier and I needed the map.

She said wait. Her apartment was a block away. She went to her place, got the map and gave it to me. The only thing she said, was, “be careful”. I knew she was a good woman. I stuffed the map in my pocket, and was ready to get out of France for good.

The next day I took a bus to this tiny town on the border, where I intended to find this priest and get his help getting over the border. This bus ride proved adventurous and a little scary. We were heading towards the

border, so the police were very suspicious. At one point the bus was pulled over, and everyone was made to get off and present their papers. This is where my doctor's note saved me again. This time I used it as an excuse to get to the Pyrennes, while last time I was using it for the Alps. The police let me back on the bus, and after our little inconvenience, we were back on the road. This happened three more times before we finally reached my town on the border. I got a room for the night, rested a bit, and went downstairs for dinner, which came with the room.

I figured I would get a quick meal before trying to find this priest. I was half way done eating, when I saw the father finishing his meal on the other side of the room. I immediately got up, left whatever I had left, and followed him outside. I approached the man and said, "father, I need to get to Spain, can you help me?"

He replied, "yes, but do you have Spanish money?"

I didn't, so he took me to get some. The town apparently had a lot of people living in it who would go from country to country and exchange money to make a profit on the black market. This was all illegal stuff obviously. The priest went to two different houses, but was able to change all my French money to Spanish money.

Then he took me into the woods on the outskirts of town and showed me where the border was. It was nothing more than a tiny creek coming down from the mountains, but on the other side was freedom. Once I crossed this tiny, winding creek, I would be in Spain, which was neutral and I would surely be safe from German persecutioun. I was prepared to get over right then and there, but the priest suggested I wait until morning, when it would be warmer and lighter.

So I went back to the hotel and told the front desk I wanted to be woken up early so I could see the sun rise.

In tthe morning, I woke up, had a big breakfast, and headed for the creek where the border was. I was finally out of France. I felt liberated immediately, and took out my map and compass to start navigating my way through these rocky mountains. I had heard stories of people jum,ping the border and wandering right back into France. So I figured out my direction, and began walking. I walked the entire day. I wqas exhausted and hungry, but I just kept going, step by step, up over mountains, and then down the other side. I was not going to wonder around the hills because I did not want to lose my direction. All I had besides my mao and compass was a canteen full of water and the clothes on my back.

I walked the entire day, only stopping for brief rests. Eat????? When it began to get dark, I had nothing to do but sleep outside, under the stars. It was cold, but I kept up the hope that each step was getting me closer and closer back to my home in Israel. I slept on the ground that night under the stars.

I woke up with the sun after a freezing night. I got a good sleep, but when I woke up I couldn't feel my feet. They were frozen and had become completely numb. I knew I had to get my boots off so I could get some blood flowing, but the pain of removing my boots was agonizing. Eventually I was able to wrench them off my frozen feet and massaged them until the blood started moving through them again, and they slowly got back to normal. I was now able to get back to the task at hand, getting out of these mountains alive before I starved or froze to death. The first couple steps were like walking on hot coals, but after a while I was alright.

The second day was just like the first. Up a mountain, and down the other side, before doing it again when I finally got over. Again, I barely stopped all day, minus a few rests, which were never for very long. That night I was lucky enough to find an abandoned house, where I could tell nobody had been for years. I managed to pry the old, creaky door open and decided to spend the night inside to save myself from the weather. The

house had clearly been abandoned for years. There was no sign of anyone and there was animal droppings everywhere.

I managed to make the corner clan enough to handle, and then gathered some hay to sleep on. That night was fine. I was able to keep warm, and the shelter from the wind helped me get a much better, warmer nights sleep. When I woke up it was back to the hike. Now I was really beginning to be hungry and was starting to worry about my chances of finding food any time soon. I found an orange peel on the old counter, and ate that, but it was terrible. I drank as much water from the creek along side the house as possible, hoping the over-hydration would take my mind off the hunger.

The third day went like all the others, but by mid day, I spotted what seemed to be an old monastery on top of one of the mountains. I decided I would check it out, and hiked up to the door. After debating the safety of talking to anyone, I decided I had walked enough, and was willing to deal with fate. “Whatever will be will be.”

The monastery was ancient, and looked almost surreal. It was perched on top of this beautiful mountain and was alone its kingdom of sharp cliffs and jagged rocks in the Pyrennes. The doorway was looming and actually a bit intimidating, but I figured I had made it this far with the

help of an enormous amount of luck, and I might as well see how far it could get me.

It turns out, the monastery was not really a monastery. It used to be, but now it was used as a place for sick people to reside. It was common back in those days for the sick to seek high elevations, as was the case with the usefulness of my doctors letter. The thing is, it was winter, so nobody was there except a short Spanish guy that was in charge of taking care of the place for the winter.

His name was -----, and he turned out to be a wonderful man. After introducing myself, he offered me a room and some dinner. This turned out to be my lucky day. I had Spanish money, which I am sure had a little to do with his helpfulness, but at least I had a meal and a warm place to sleep. I ate as soon as he could prepare my meal, which was corn soup with bread, and went straight to bed. That was probably the best night of sleep I have had in my entire life.

In the morning, ----- let me borrow his razor, and I got a much needed shower and shave. Now I was out of the mountains, and decided to take the highway to the nearest town. The road leading up the old monastery ended at the drive way, and I had had enough trekking through the Pyrennes alone. This time I walked along the road.

Eventually I reached the town of Vic. There was civil guards everywhere, as Franco was still ruling the country with an iron fist following his victory in the civil war of a few years back. I was certainly intimidated by all the guards I saw, but I eventually realized I could not walk anymore, and it was time to get on train and try to make it to a big city.

I wound up buying a ticket to Barcelona, where I was certain I could catch a boat home. It turns out I had about almost two hours to spare before the train left, so I went to find a place to relax. I wound up in a cemetery, but it was comfortable, and I figured nobody would bother me there.

After relaxing a bit, I bought a newspaper, and boarded the train. I figured if I covered my face with a paper, I would not be bothered by anyone, and would have a better chance of avoiding trouble. My plan worked for a while, but I had not considered one crucial element in the mix. It turns out, and there was no way for me to know this, but Franco had forbidden any movement of any kind without permission. So it was not long before his guards were walking down the aisle asking to see everyone's papers. This was not good. I tried everything I could to avoid confrontation, but they were sweeping all the cars and everyone was fair game. My luck had finally run out.

After showing these guards my papers, which I knew were not sufficient to be able to travel through Spain, I was apprehended and taken to the first class car, where they were keeping their prisoners. In hindsight, I had no chance. Things were bad in Spain at that time, and they could have known I was an outsider just by noticing my shoes were so much nicer than everyone else's. When I arrived, there was already one other prisoner in the car. It was a Jewish man named -----, he was from Tunis. The guards were not extremely strict, and it was actually more laid back than one would expect. Marcel and I talked a bit, and we even shared a little Brandy that he had with him. Eventually we were joined by another man named Marcel, from Strassbourg, and we waited, under the supervision of the guards, for our arrival to Barcelona, and whatever fait may have in store for us.

On the way, I began to speak a little with the guard in the first class car. I had the Ladino background, and we could at least communicate. The other two spoke no Spanish, or Catalan, or anything close. After chatting for a while, I figured out that they were required to take us back to Vic to be processed there. We had a little time to eat and drink, and we bought food and brandy for the guards.

When we arrived in back to Vic, we were taken to the police station, and thrown in a cell in the basement. This was a tiny little cement room,

barely big enough for the three of us. It was terrible that night. The beds had no mattresses, just the metal frame to sleep on. They also took all of our stuff.

We didn't get to our cell until past midnight, and we were told that in the morning we had to go back to Barcelona, where we would be imprisoned. Not only that, but we had to buy our own ticket. It was in the cell that Marcel began to scheme. He told us that he knew Barcelona very well from vacations before the war and wanted to try and escape. Marcel was determined to come up with something, but I felt a little reluctant. I surely did not think I had done anything too bad, and definitely did not want to find myself any more trouble than I already had. Marcel was persistent, and decided that he would buy a bottle of brandy before boarding the train and do the same thing we had done the day before. This time he planned on getting the guards drunk and making a run for it.

In the morning we were woken up, and taken to the train station. Once again, the guards were pretty passive in their restraint on us, and let us buy some food and our tickets, as long as we were buying them food, which is exactly what Marcel was banking on. After letting the guards get a little drunk off his Brandy, Marcel waited until the train reached Barcelona. In the confusion of all the passengers rushing the doors to exit the train Marcel

made his move. Miraculously, he was able to accomplish the initial goal of getting out of sight but the guards took chase. One of the four stayed with the two of us, and the rest followed Marcel's route. We were sure he would be caught and were actually quite curious to see what the punishment for doing something like this would be. To our astonishment, the three guards actually came back empty handed. I was personally amazed, but was happy for my new friend. The best part is I knew we would be there when the four guards showed up to the jail in Barcelona with two prisoners when they had promised to bring three.

When we arrived to the police station in Barcelona, --- and I were sent to the waiting room while our guards went to check us in. We could hear them getting yelled at and actually heard someone get hit. That made my day. Then we were fingerprinted, had our pictures taken and were stuffed into a holding cell in the basement.

The cell in Barcelona was even worse than the one in Vic. Again, we were in the basement, but this time there were forty of us. Everyone was from the frontier. There were people of all types down there. It was all men. All people that were caught around the frontier without the proper papers. By then it was nearly impossible to get travel visas through Spain

because you had to be able to prove you were going somewhere, and most of the people had no where to go. They were all fleeing trouble in Europe.

The room we were stuffed into must have been for 20 people, but all 40 of us were crammed in. That night we slept leaning against one another, because there was no room to sleep any other way. Surprisingly though, people were getting along. There was usually a language barrier, but we could feel each others pain, and realized we were all in the same boat. The

next morning we received a meal from a restaurant. The American embassy had paid for this restaurant to send food to all of us.

The next day, all 40 of us were put on a bus and taken to the real prison. This was called Carcel de Modelo de Barcelona. Here, again we were crammed into cells. These cells were also awful. There were no beds, just a hole in the corner for a toilet and an old faucet. We were again sleeping head to foot because there was so little room. There were already way too many prisoners from the civil war, and when you added that to the prisoners from the frontier and factored in the poor economy resulting from the civil war, it all led to awful conditions in the prisons.

The conditions here were terrible, but after a few days we got lucky. It turned out the American embassy had sent in some blankets for us. Now at least we were sleeping on blankets instead of concrete.

They had a prisoner who was in charge of serving food. Three times a day, he would walk down the hall, and we would stick out our bowls so he could give us some soup. Eventually people began to get angry at the fact that the Spanish prisoners were receiving more food than the foreigners. When I asked the prisoner who was serving us why he was doing that, he said it was because we were leaving the next day, and the Spaniards were there for life. That sounded reasonable, but when we weren't released the next day I questioned him again... and got the same reply, "*Manyana, manyana*". We stayed in this jail for 44 days.

Finally, after spending a month and a half in this prison, all the interned refugees from the frontier were all taken to the basement of the prison, and paired up in groups of two. Then we were tied together at the wrists with pieces of wire. The wire was very sharp and many of our wrists began to bleed soon after we were fastened together.

When everyone was tied together in groups of two by the wrists, they brought out the shackles for our feet. Now they tied our legs together? Once this was all finished we finally saw daylight for the first time. It was probably almost noon by the time they were finished organizing us. Now we were marched outside, with guards surrounding us carrying their guns. This time, however, instead of taking a bus, we walked to the train station. I

was completely confused at this point. I had heard there were concentration camps in Spain left over from the civil war, and had sort of expected to be sent to one of those.

It took well over an hour of walking to reach the train station. When we arrived, we were loaded into boxcars like cattle, and the doors were shut. I felt the train moving underneath me, and

The Axis were eventually funneled into Tunisia, at the Northern tip of Africa, and defeated. The prisoners of war taken was the largest amount to date (wein 446). This was crucial. Now the focus of the Allies was on Sicily and eventually Italy herself. Though the fighting for the Italian peninsula would prove extremely difficult, the Allies eventually deposed Mussolini in July 1943, and Italy made peace two months later. This opened up the underbelly of Europe, but the Allies still had intentions of a cross-channel invasion.

At the same time the Americans and British were defeating the Axis in Northern Africa, the horrible battle of Stalingrad finally ended. Although the Germans had 90% of the city at one point, and Hitler had already begun his victory speeches, the Russians pulled out an astonishing victory (Vail Motter 481), in a large part due to Hitler's

necessity of sending troops to help out in Northern Africa. He had finally spread himself too thin and was paying the price for his greed.

We arrived from the prison, to the concentration camp at midnight. It was all 200 of us from the prison. We were all given forms to be filled out, and upon completion, they gave us the living essentials. The residents of the camp who were able to speak a few languages were assigned the job of checking in the new inmates and giving them their supplies for camp life. This consisted of a rusted steel plate, a cup, and an empty sack to sleep on. It was the intention that we would fill the sack with whatever we could find to make a mattress to sleep. Every now and then, they would drop off a load of hay to be used as filling for our mattress', but there was far too little of it, and people used to fight over the little bit that was available.

We wore the same clothes the whole time, they didn't give us anything, and they took all we had when we were admitted.

After receiving these essential items we were sent to our bunks and given the rundown of the working of the camp?. The barracks were like large, abandoned barns. There were no bunks however, and people would

sleep on the floor. There was always competition. Everyone had to fight for everything, whether it was room on the floor to sleep, warm clothes, or filling for our mattress bags. By this point, no matter what your story was, you had certainly been through a lot and life began to revolve around essentials. The only essential thing in anyone's life at this point was survival and most people were determined to do anything they had to do to outlast the war, which would hopefully end soon.

The camp was surrounded by electric fences. There were also intermittent towers, which would have a guard on duty all night. For the entire night they would go down the line yelling, "alerta", until the next tower responded, "alerta", and so on. I imagine it was to help them stay awake for they really did not have very exciting jobs as no one would dare get zapped by the electric fence.

For meals, one of the guards would bang a large steel bell and everyone would form their lines. All the inmates would walk single file by the chef, who would dump a spoonful of soup on your plate. They would dump the soup as fast as they could serve it, so if you didn't keep moving, your portion would be on the floor. The food was terrible, just dirty soup.

In the morning, the camp orchestra would begin to play the Spanish Hymn, which was the sign that it was time to report for line up. All 4,000

people in the camp would then line up in their assigned spot, and wait for their name to be called so the civil guard was sure nobody was missing. This was all in Spanish, and luckily I spoke Ladino, which was easily understood by the guards. Although this would prove beneficial to me later on, for line up purposes, all you needed to do was listen for your name to be called, and raise your hand. Obviously, not all of the prisoners spoke Spanish but I really do not recall this causing too many difficulties.

There was a Kiosk in the camp, so if there was something you needed, the rest of your day would consist of waiting in line to buy something. Most people in the camp had money and jewels, so a lot of people could afford to buy things they wanted at this store. The fact that most people paid for help over the frontier, or got monetary help because of their prestige before the war led to this money being present in the camp. So there ended up being almost a little business community of its own inside the camp walls.

There were all sorts of men in this camp, waiting to be passed over to the hands of the Germans. There were Polish soldiers, English soldiers, Jewish refugees from France and all other countries in Europe, and then all the political refugees that the Germans feared and wanted to get their hands on.

There were no Spanish prisoners at this point. All the prisons in Spain were filled with the enemies of Franco's state, and for the most part they were going to be there for the rest of their lives. I knew this was the case because when I was in Jail, the Spanish prisoners were in cells across from ours. One day some of the people began to complain that the Spanish prisoners were getting more soup, so I said something to the guard about it. He told me that we would leave soon, but the men getting more soup were going to be there for the rest of their lives. I respected the man's honesty and whenever anyone would complain from that point on, I would tell them to shut up.

The concentration camp was set up so you had to go through a gate to get to the soldiers camp, then a gate to get to the Civil Guard camp, who were above the army, and finally you passed through a gate leading to freedom. -----more on set up of camp.

One man I knew, traded all his money for gold jewelry that the other inmates had. Once he had accumulated enough gold, he built a fire, melted all the gold down, and made it into a belt buckle. He had some job before the war where he learned how to do this. Once he had his large, gold belt buckle, he painted it black with some shoe polish he bought at the kiosk. He ended up with the most expensive belt buckle I have ever seen and was able

to get all that gold out of the concentration camp with him, without the authorities having any idea what was going on.

I never dreamed of escaping, because there were many rumors of the consequences. I was not in the camp for long before I heard stories of failed escape attempts in the past. It seems that when someone got caught, the guards took it personally and were determined to make an example of the prisoner. The escapee would be hung in the middle of the camp and the body would remain rotting, hanging from a rope for a week. In my case the guards' strategy for preventing further escape attempts worked just as planned. I was scared stiff at the thought of having to watch someone be hung, never mind actually being hung myself.

Although there were always rumors of this atrocious punishment, when I was there I remember two instances of escape attempts being put down without such harsh punishments. One man I knew, happened to be a tailor before the war started. He worked for weeks, making a replica uniform of the Civil Guard. One night, when the moon was not too dark, my friend put on the uniform he had made, and began to walk to freedom. When he was about to get to the gate, another Civil Guard came running after him because the man wanted to join my friend for a drink in town. It certainly did not take much time for the plan to be uncovered and for my

friend to wind up in pots of trouble. Although he escaped execution, he won himself time in solitary confinement, which was the method of punishment in Miranda del Ebro at this point in the war.

Another instance of attempting an escape came one day when the American Embassy sent a truck with relief goods. This would happen about once a week. They would drive in and drop off whatever they could. Sometimes it was chocolate, sometimes it was sardines----- So one day when the truck came in, one of the prisoners snuck underneath and somehow held on to the bottom as it drove off. The guards had seen the man sneak under the truck, but they figured there was no way he could hold on, and figured he would either be killed, or fall off far before the truck left the premises. To their amazement, however, this man was able to make it all the way out of the camp, which is when they sent a truck to follow and wait for the man to fall off. I heard the man held on for so long that the camp truck following the embassy truck eventually had to speed ahead, make them stop, and take the prisoner back for his time in solitary confinement.

Soon after arriving, I made myself a bag out of linens I was able to find in the trash. I would put everything I had in this bag, including my razor, my soap, and everything else I had. While I slept and when I was out, I would hang the bag on the wall in my barrack. One day I came back and it

was gone. Everyone knew who stole my bag, it was a man who called himself ----- . He claimed to be a doctor from Canada, but nobody believed him. Anyway, he was notorious for having a gambling problem, and apparently after losing all his money in card games, he sold my stuff for more money to gamble away. By the time I got around to doing something about this, it was too late because he had already lost everything.

The only way I ever found peace of mind back then was when I found time to sneak off by myself. I would go into an area of the camp where nobody else was and would sing to myself in Hebrew. It was so calming to be alone and remember where I came from and what my traditions were in a time of so much stress, questioning and general disarray of life.

It was one time when I was off alone, quietly singing to myself in Hebrew that I met -----, a father and son from Belgium who understood Hebrew. We immediately hit it off. I think part of the reason we connected so easily was because we could converse in Hebrew, and this was very relieving for all of us. They eventually came with me to Israel and even lived in my house for a little while.

I was placed in a barrack with all Jewish refugees, and we were discriminated against even within the walls of the camp. Sometimes, when these soldiers were able to find some money and buy alcohol from the

Spanish guards, they would get drunk and vandalize our bunks. They would just come in and wreck everything in sight, just out of hate. I can not imagine how ignorant they could be, actually being cruel to people with a common enemy, but I was witness to their hate and will never forget it.

The guards had a special liking for me, because I was one of the few inmates who spoke Spanish. I gave them cigarettes some times and they would repay me with favors here and there. They were not overly strict on us, and I never saw anyone beaten or anything like that. They were just following orders and making sure everyone stayed in line and did not cause problems. At night, we would sit around the fire together and if I had any chocolate mix from the embassy deliveries I would make them hot water. One time the sargeant was relaxing and talking with us and he did me a favor. He tool me to the wood pile, where you would be in serious trouble getting caught under any other circumstances. I still can't get over this, but he put down his machine gun and helped me load up my arms with fire wood. When I was loaded up, he picked up his gun, and walked with me back to the barracks. Nobody would dare say anything because he was the Sargeant.

There was an organization in the camp, which was set up to regulate the rights of the inmates. This was for the general good of the inmates. It

wasn't for Jews, or prisoners of war or political refugees, it was for everyone. They were in consistent contact with the US embassy in Madrid and were working on ways to get us out. It was a widespread feeling that if we remained in the camp, it could not be too long until the Germans came through and sent us to our death. It was the decision of this organization that the entire camp go on a hunger strike to draw attention to our situation.

It was only ----- after I had arrived, but I was determined to help our cause in any way possible. This was one of the most trying times of my life. Everyone in the camp was involved. I am sure some people did not go through with it, but for the most part, it was a group effort.

The first day, everyone passed through the food line, but held their plate upside down so all the food wound up on the floor. The decision had been made, we would rather die in Spain than in Germany at the hands of the enemy. We were all determined not eat or drink anything until liberation or death ended the strike. The first two or three days were by far the worst. After that, everyone sort of just prepared to die. We were in this for real, and were determined to be heard.

Finally, the American presence in North Africa became threatening enough for Franco to decide to liberate us. Spain, having their share of North Africa, eventually found reason enough to lighten up on the prisoners

and change their “neutral” stance of helping Hitler, to a “neutral” stance of appeasing the Allied forces.

Although we were not all freed at once, the Spanish government agreed to let up to 30 people go per day on the condition we had a sponsor willing to take care of us and that we would not work in Spain.

The Soviets began their massive Winter Offensive in February of 1943. After the German’s humiliating defeat at Stalingrad it was only a matter of time before the Soviets took their land back in the West and made their move towards Berlin.

At the same time the Soviets were pushing the Germans back, the United States and Great Britain were finishing the buildup of forces in England for the cross channel invasion.

On June 6, 1944, the Allied forces launched the largest

When I was in Barcelona I befriended a man named Shimshon Glantzman. He was an orthodox Jew who moved to Spain before the civil war and settled in Barcelona. He was from Romania. I was introduced to him by a friend of mine named. We celebrated every important Jewish holiday together, for there were not many Jews living in Barcelona.

I used to live across the street from a linens store. One day I was in the store looking around. I have no idea why, but I was there. So I ran into a nice woman and began talking. At one point she asked me where I was from and when I replied, Israel, she jumped back she was so surprised. It turns out that before she moved from Poland to Spain, she had studied the Talmud in Poland and had learned Hebrew. So I was ready to get on my way, but she refused to let me go before I met her daughter, who was on her way home from the university. Her daughter was named Eva School. She was my first friend and she eventually helped me organize the Hebrew classes I taught, and helped me organize people for the Red Cross boat to Israel.

They used to sell fire wood from a plot of land they owned out in the country. Their back burnt down during the Civil War, but they luckily had a receipt from their polish money and they were not completely ruined by the fire.

